TRUE KNOWLEDGE

(ŚREE ŚUSHKA VEDAANTA TAMO BHAASKARAMU)

(The Sunlight of Truth Dispelling the Darkness
of
Empty Metaphysics)

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FOREWORD

Sri Malayala Swamiji is one of the outstanding spiritual personalities of 20th century South India. He established his Ashram in Chittore district (Andhra Pradesh), and through his daily discourses there, frequent lecture tours throughout the Telugu-speaking area with Chaturmasyas at different places every year, and numerous publications (translations of classics as well as monographs), he spread the message of Vedanta in an authentic, forceful as well as a popular way. Innumerable men and women from small–and middle–peasant families and some belonging to the urban bourgeoisie were inspired by his teachings and became his followers.

Sri Malayala Swami's "Sushka–Vedanta Tamobhaskaramu", of which this work is the English translation is a scholarly and original presentation of Vedanta in Telugu. Two of its great merits are its simple and lucid style and its concentration on those aspects of Vedanta which are universal and rational. Most of the statements in it are supported by numerous quotations from ancient and medieval Hindu religious literature. The essentials of Vedantic metaphysics and ethics will be clearly understood by its careful readers. It is a classic of its kind in Telugu.

I am very happy Shri R. M. Challa has translated this into English. He is a versatile scholar and a reputed writer. A better translator than him could not have been found. The translation has been done with fidelity, care and charm. I commend it, and hope it will be read widely.

Andhra University
14 February 84

K. Satchidananda Murty

PREFACE

Blessed Self,

Hari Om ! Hari Om ! Hari Om !
Salutations ! !

Malayala Swami was a rare phenomenon and he belonged to one of those mighty spiritual masters that we had in the recent times. But unlike every one of them, Malayala Swami had the in-depth knowledge of our scriptures, and, in his extreme erudition, he explained things in a simple style to make his disciples and admirers understand the deeper significances of pure Advaita philosophy. His entire life was one continuous *satsang*, be he with the audience, or be he sitting all alone.

Never was he tired of answering questions asked by his innumerable devotees who made a pilgrimage to Yerpedu, year after year, again and again, attracted by the irresistable charm of this simple and extremely humble master, wanting nothing for himself, living in the barest minimum the simplest life that I know of, and yet tirelessly working, almost round the clock, all through the calendar months, for more than forty years.

This saint who came from Kerala annexed Andhra Pradesh into the kingdom of Advaita. Where he found the time and the mental poise to write so many brilliant commentaries and notes upon the scriptures, besides conducting schools and other social welfare centres, and moulding out of raw boys exquisite men of perfection, is a mystery.

I consider it a great favour done to the millions in our country and abroad, when the Ashram decided to bring out the gracious thoughts of the Master, through the English translation of his conversations with his disciples.

This volume is very very detailed, and out of a mountain of recorded manuscripts, the editor has chosen the right type of

questions and has faithfully brought out the inimitable style of the Swami in exhaustively replying even the simple-looking, and often mischievous, questions.

Other masters also have brought out volumes of their conversations with students, wherein their own personal opinions are often given out. Malayala Swami is too orthodox and he entertains such an enormous reverence to the scriptures that from his intellectual computer, streams out beautiful and appropriate quotations, from a wide array of authentic text-books, in order to prove even a simple idea. This provides a kind of vital education to those who are seriously studying this volume.

I am looking forward to many such translations to flood the spiritual shelves in India, and I feel confident to guarantee that there is enough of the right reader-class now evolved in this country, who have the thirst to read such books. They can seek their consolation and spiritual unfoldment in these pages.

With Prem and Om,

Thy Own Self

Camp : BHUBANESWAR

February 5, 1984

Chinmayananda

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is the fruit of the spiritual experiences of our holy Guru, His Holiness Malayala Swami, during his penance in the 'Go-garbha' cave in Tirumalai.

As the Swamiji himself noted in the ensuing pages, he was disturbed by the meretricious ways of his fellow monks, and he wanted to speak out against their addiction to drugs and meat—for their own good.

During his day it was still held that women and certain sections of society were not qualified to read the scriptures. The Swamiji also wanted to fight against this superstitious belief, taking his authority from the selfsame scriptures.

Indeed, as the title suggests, ever since its publication, this book has swept away many cobwebs of superstition, dispelled the darkness of false philosophy, and enabled all classes of people to learn the truth about God and religion and philosophy—as they are applicable to everyday life.

As the table of contents indicates, this has a wide range of topics to deal with, impartially and evocatively.

Every day we keep receiving orders for the supply of this book. Not to limit its universal, eternal message to the Telugu-speaking reading public alone, we are now publishing it in its English translation, for the benefit of the entire world of the seekers after Truth.

This book was the first of the Swamiji's writings. It has gone through thirteen reprints in Telugu.

In placing this English version before the international public, our aim is partly to redeem our spiritual debt to the departed great soul and partly to carry his immortal voice to every nook and corner of the world.

We are sure that God will bless us for doing His good work and that the readers will continue to encourage our humble efforts as they have all along been doing.

Our thanks are due to Sri R. M. Challa for his able translation; to Sri A. Nageswara Rao for his beautiful printing of the book; to Prof. K. Satchidananda Murty for the Foreward ; and to Swami Chinmayananda for the Preface.

We are happy to publish this book on the occasion of the Malayala Swamy Centenary, 1985.

Om Jai Gurudev !

Vyaasaasramamu
12-4-1984

Publishers

ॐ

SRI MALAYALA SWAMY

Maharshi Sadguru Sri Malayalaswamy (Asanganandagiri), the founder of the famous Vyasasramam, near Yerpedu, Chittoor Dt., A.P., is one of the great Saints, who by both his utterances and practices, contributed in no small measure to Spiritual Renaisisance in recent times in India.

Born in Kerala in 1885, he cultivated from the very early stages of his illustrious life, a deep sense of detachment and a rigorous religious self-discipline. Travelling on foot from Himalayas to Cape Comorin, he visited almost all the pilgrim centres in India, till he finally settled at a place called 'Gogarbham' on the Tirumalai Hills, where he received his Enlightenment after twelve years of deep meditation.

The Enlightened Saint thereafter determined to devote himself to the noble task of serving the cause of the Spiritual uplift in the Andhra region. The immediate result of this decision was the establishment of 'Sri Vyasasramam' in 1926 near Yerpedu on a picturesque spot. In due course, he started there a Sanskrit School and did invaluable service for the propagation of this great language. With a view to carrying his message of Vedanta to every nook and corner of the state, he founded "Sri Sanatana Vedanta Jnana Sabha" in 1927. He started "Yathartha Bharati", a philosophical monthly, which was the first of its kind in Telugu.

Carrying on his spiritual activities unhampered in and beyond the Asramam, he took over the 'Fourth Stage of Life' (Tureeyasrama) in 1936. By starting Kanyagurukuam (a residential School for girls) in the Asramam, he made the study of Sanskrit language for girls possible.

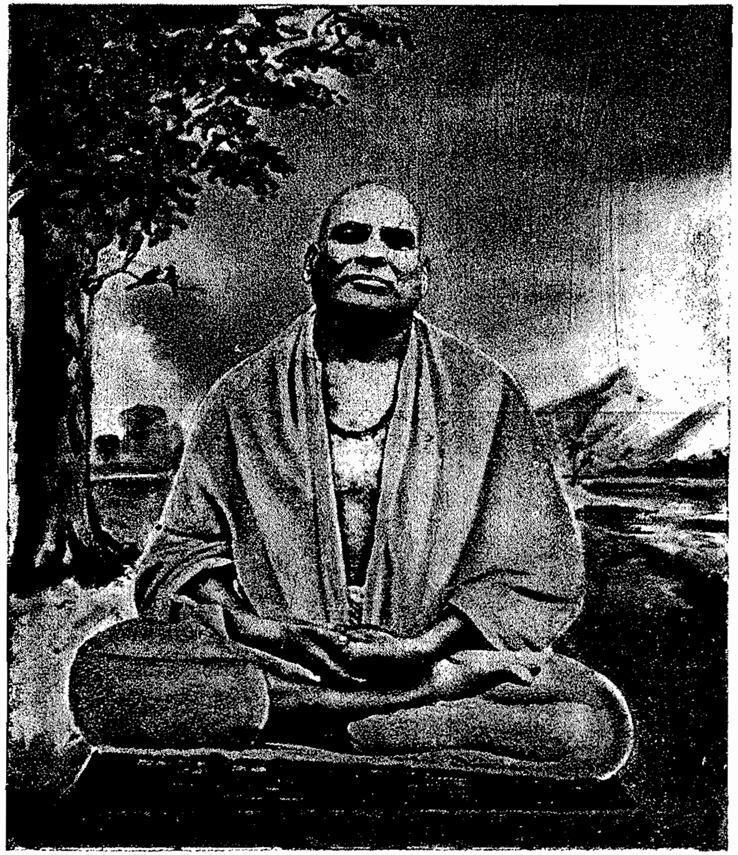
He also established many institutions affiliated to the Asramam in the various parts of the Andhra State. His services to the propagation of the philosophy of the Gita are unparalleled. He not only wrote original works like 'Sushkavedanta Tamo-Bhaskaram', but also published, with introduction and commentary, works like 'Yogavasishtham' and 'Bhagavadgita'.

Attracted by his great qualities of a Spiritual teacher, thousands of people became his disciples. He firmly believed that, irrespective of caste and community, every interested man has a right to pursue spiritual education.

The Swami who has sacrificed his entire life for the uplift of the distressed and the downtrodden left his mortal body in 1962.

On hearing about the sudden passing away of Sri Malayalaswamy, Swami Sivananda, the founder of 'Divine Life Society' paid his glorious tribute to the late Swami by describing his life as a commentary of Bhagavad Gita.

AUM



SRI SADGURU
MAHARSHI MALAYALA SWAMULAVARU

PROEM

No special attempt has been made in this book to dwell at length on the three studies of 'Taaraka' (the chanting of the name of God to cross the sea of 'samsaara' or the cycle of birth-life-death–rebirth) or 'Saankhya' (true knowledge) or 'Amanaska' (supramental state of Transcendence).

Indeed, to try to write a new treatise on the perennial philosophy of Hinduism — sufficiently equipped as we are with the exhaustive masterworks like the Prasthaana-trayam (Upanishads, Brahma Sootra and Bhagavat Geeta), Panchadasi (a book on Vedaanta metaphysics by Vidyaranya Swami) and Jnaana Vaasishtham (which follows the pattern of the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue of the Gita, between Vasishtha and Rama) — is like showing a lamp to the sun.

Then, why this effort ? I believe that the majority of our seekers after Truth are not yet fit to imbibe the nectar of the message of the sacred texts mentioned just now. While they, by themselves, do not have the necessary imagination to grasp the mystic tenets of Vedaanta, even the modern saints and sages are misleading them. It is a matter of utmost regret to me to have to say that we have almost none in our midst, who are really detached from the world, dedicated to the teaching of the knowledge of the Universal Self, devoted to the supreme spirit of God, and properly qualified to spread the spiritual message of yore.

Even though a path is broad and well-laid, it would become thorny and unpassable if it is untrodden for many years ; similarly, if the theoretical path of our great philosophy is untraversed by genuinely realised souls, it would give birth to the thorn-like charlatans who exploit the credulous masses for their self-aggrandisement. So it is my humble hope to enlighten the seekers of God-realisation, through a catechism-like analysis of the real intent and purpose of the scriptures, on the need to do away with the current superstitious beliefs and malpractices in the realm of religion and philosophy, and to restore the pristine purity of Hinduism.

This book may hurt the feelings of some of the false prophets. The world looks coloured to those who look at it with coloured glasses. But if the impartial reader is prepared to take a look at the reality of man and God with his natural eye of truthful insight, he will be duly rewarded by a perusal of this book.

We need not be concerned about the detractors and the quacks; we must even have the sagacity and the vision to treat the insults of the evil-minded people as blessings in disguise.

As the Vajra Soochikaa Upanishat puts it, "an insult by the ignorant is an ornament to the wise" (Dooshanam jnaanaheenaanaam bhooshanam jnaana-chakshushaam.)

The obstacles in the path of God-consciousness should all the more make us firm in our resolve to reach that supreme goal.

LOKAAH SAMASTAAH SUKHINAH BHAVANTU !

(May the people of the entire universe be happy)

MALAYALA SWAMI

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that the majority of men are now impelled by a strong and sensible desire to learn the truth about man's real Self. Verily all such people are blessed, for, just as the dawn heralds the sunrise, so does such good thoughts precede the attainment of self-knowledge.

However, mere intention does not create Deliverance or conduce to Bliss. It is only for want of genuine devotion and dutiful practice of the sacred precepts that most of us are unable to enjoy absolute peace of mind, let alone the supreme feeling of salvation.

I know of my linguistic limitations. But my simple intention is to promote the search for truth that made you, dear readers, take up the study of this book. If I am able to help you in your worthy search, the credit goes to my Guru; if there are any errors in my work they belong to me, but I sincerely hope they are not so serious as to misguide you. If you have the goodness to read me through, even when at a certain point you feel that I am mistaken, you will realise that my ultimate conclusions are well-founded and well-reasoned. In order to determine the nature of a foreign country's climate you have to stay there all the four seasons ...

And then, what is said of Jnaana Vaasishtham, is equally true in the case of this book ; neither the realised souls nor the dunces find this useful — it is only meant for those who realise that they are caught in the web of a transitory 'samsaara' and that they should therefore try to release themselves from it, while they have the chance in this human birth, which is a rare and hard-to-get one. That is, medicine is useful only to those who are sick and can be cured—but not to the healthy or to those who suffer from an incurable disease.

Aham baddhah vimuktah syaam iti yasya asti niśchayah
Na atyantam ajnah na tat-jnah sah asmin śaastre adhikaaravaan

(He who knows that he is in bondage and is determined to free himself from it — who is neither too ignorant nor fully wise —, is the right person to read this book).

I now address myself to the preceptors of this age. Dear modern saints and sages, my first request to you is not to tell the sincere seekers who approach you that it is difficult to gain salvation without going through the family life. If you force them into married life, they will before long desert their wives.

As for the women, very few of them have a sense of detachment, and those few who do have it find it hard to get out of the clutches of 'samsaara'.

My second request is, if by mischance you are addicted to drugs like 'ganja', you should refrain from passing on the bad habit to your disciples. We see that those "Saadhus" who are slaves to this habit become not religious mendicants but beggars, always on the lookout for the means to keep themselves well-stocked with the habit-forming drug and never having a moment to meditate. If only our so-called *Saadhus* (religious mendicants) are rid of this pernicious habit, the world would be a better place to live in.

My third request is that you should do your best to discourage cruelty to animals and meat-eating. There is no better service you can do to the world than promoting non-violence.

There is no greater disservice to humanity than that of preaching supramentality to each and every one, without first judging the individual's merit or demerit.

Only when a lamp burns without oil, or paddy is grown without irrigation, can one gain true knowledge without mercy, towards all creation (jeeva-kaarunyam).

If water can be stored in a tank which has no banks then only can self-knowledge come to those who have no self-control.

Now I call upon the sincere seekers after truth to do some self-searching.

Beloved sisters and brothers,

It is possible that among your Gurus there are some who have passed the stage of being bound by the ordained duty (*vidhi*) and by the forbidding regulation *(nishedha)*; some who are above the distinctions of a particular caste (varna) and a particular stage of life (aasrama); some who have even graduated from the steps of retentive meditation (dhaarana) and trance-like contemplation (dhyaana); and some who can safely eat and drink anything—even hellfire and brimstone. You will be sorely disappointed if you attempt such things, without judging the real position of those who achieve those feats.

The great souls have the twin-powers of *'nigraha'* (restraint) and *'anugraha'* (showing mercy as one pleases) — which are not within the reach of the ordinary mortals.

Till you reach the state of perfect self-awareness you must persevere in solitary living, frugal diet, self-restraint and introspection. You have to judge for yourselves whether or not your mind is uninfluenced by earthly allurements. When you are not sure of your ground in this respect, but try to ape the realised souls, you will be lost to both worldly life and otherworldly bliss.

The people who suffer from malaria may be temporarily cured by quinine. But if they are misled by that temporary relief into thinking that they are perfectly cured, and neglect to observe proper diet or to take further precautions, they will be even more troubled than usual when they are next attacked by the fever. So also the seekers who are contented with the little self-restraint or self-knowledge they acquire, and therefore think that they can do as they please, will be sorely disappointed before long and will have to begin their practice afresh or may even be lured away from what little they learnt into the old world of ignorance and self-deceit.

It is true that there are many obstacles on the path to self-knowledge. But still, the sense of devotion, which is within one's own power, and which no outside force on earth can take away from one, can make anyone face any difficulty with mental equilibrium.

Besides,

Daivee hi eshaa guṇa-mayee, Mama Maayaa duratyayaa
Maam eva ye prapadyante, Maayaam etaam taranti te

(This apparent creative principle of Maayaa is composed of the three modes — Sattwa the noble, Rajas the passionate, and Tamas the ignorantly dull — of Nature located in the apparent manifestation of godhead, and it is therefore very difficult to circumvent its snares. And yet, they who approach Me with utter self-surrender and faith can easily get over this Maayaa).

Lord Krishnna is supported by the Swetaaswatara Upanishat :

Yasya Deve paraa bhaktih yathaa Deve tathaa Gurau
Tasya ete kathitaah hi arthaah Prakaaśante mahaatmanah

(To the blessed person, who has implicit fiath in God and in the Teacher that initiates him in god-realisation, all the eternal truths of transcendental knowledge become crystal clear).

In this verse it is also suggested that the devotee-disciple has to look upon both God and his Teacher with equal regard. For,

Guru-vaktre sthitaa vidyaa Guru-bhaktyaa cha labhyate
Trailokye sphuṭa-vaktaarah devarshi-pitṛ-maanavaah

(The learned denizens of the three realms – the divine sages, the sanctified forefathers and the wise men — stress the fact that, inasmuch as true knowledge resides in the mouth — at the tip of the tongue — of the Guru, it can be obtained only through devotion to him, the teacher).

At the same time, even as the teacher has to test the merit of the student to whom he intends to impart divine knowledge, so also should the pupil be careful in choosing the right and just teacher.

Guravah bahavah santi śishya-vitta-apahaarakaah
Tam ekam durlabham manye śishya-hṛt-taapa-haarakam

(There are myriad teachers who are ready to receive the fees from the student. But it is rare to find a teacher who is fit to release the student from the distress of ignorance in his heart), said the Lord in the Guru Geetaa.

Therefore, dear friends, beware of the self-seeking preceptors who deceive you with vain teachings like the one about the soul's being detached from the body in such a way as to be unaffected by any bodily misdeed or material bad habit such as addiction to drugs.

Even if you cannot find a good Guru, God will take pity upon you and inspire you with the needed wisdom, in return for the simple faith you place in Him.

Teshaam satata-yuktaanaam bhajataam preeti-poorvakam
Dadaami buddhi-yogam tam yena Maam upayaanti te

(To all those devout people who are constantly dedicated to Me, with tender affection, I Myself will grant the Yoga of intellectual brilliance, which will enable them to reach Me without fail), says Lord Krishna.

The Guru should also be subjected to the four-way test : Are his words truthful and peaceful, and spoken with the conviction of experience ? Is he avoiding sensual activities ? Is his way of living and eating indicative of *Sattwa* nature ? Are his deeds useful to the world or to himself ?

If one overlooks this precaution, one may be buying gilt under the impression that it is gold.

The really realised souls never indulge in sensual pleasures or fail to look upon others as themselves or regret material loss or crave other's property. If anyone has these good qualities, no matter whether he is high-born or an 'outcaste', he is entitled to receive the instruction of self-knowledge.

In this connection it is well to remember the words of the ancient sages. Manu declared - "Antyaat api param Dharmam" (the great moral law can be learnt, even from a low-born one). Sankaraachaarya admitted : "Chandaalah astu sah tu dwijah astu Guruh iti eshaa maneeshaa mama" (As long as the individual realises the unity of the individual and the universal Spirit, whether he is a Brahmin or a Harijan, I am prepared to accept him as my Guru).

Yours in God,
MALAYAALA SWAAMI

AN APPEAL

Dear Readers,

Just as the river Ganga does not lose its sanctity even when it flows in a crooked fashion or over rugged land, so also may this monistic, spiritual and devotional message of mine be regarded as essentially sacred, regardless of its linguistic lapses.

No attempt has been made to show in bad light any other religion or religious leader.

My only aim in expressing my thoughts in this form is to share with dedicated seekers after Truth my sincerely felt convictions and beliefs concerning the eternal verities handed down to us by the saints and sages of yore. The publication of this book, indeed, is the fruit of the effort of some seekers of salvation like you.

I am of course deeply concerned about the spiritual degeneration even in the midst of my brother ascetics. Like the brothers of a man who is leading a degenerate life, I am worried about these misguided monks and their misleading habits. In exposing their evil ways it is my humble intention to do them good — for, by mending their hypocritical habits, they will be benefiting themselves as well as their companions and followers.

My other regret is that, unlike in olden times when even householders (including the housewives) were keen on learning spiritual truths and leading a virtuous life, today such is not the case.

So I appeal to all of you to accept this message of mine regarding the true interpretation of our tradition and philosophy, in the spirit in which it is offered to you, and to live up to it

Even as I humbly loved my God and my fellow-men equally well, so too do I hope and pray that you love one another as the children of one God.

Yours in divine service,
MALAYAALA SWAAMI.

PROLOGUE

Mangalam Guru-devaaya mahaneeya-guṇaatmane
Sarva-loka-śaraṇyaaya saadhu-roopaaya mangalam

(All hail to the godly Guru, the noble soul, the refuge of the whole world, the quintessence of piety !)

A DISCIPLE'S PREFACE

Once when my great Guru, His Holiness Malayaala Swaami was seated in solitary meditation, in perfect peace with himself and his surroundings, I fell prostrate before him and reverentially spoke these words :

"O Master, kindly shower upon my heart, burning with the fire of ignorance, your gentle ambrosia of divine knowledge"

When I found him unmoved by my supplication, I hastened to question him thus :

"If great men like you, who have saved their souls through self-realisation, retreat into silent meditation, who will help us lost souls, to cross the sea of 'samsaara,"?

Then the Master replied :

" Dear friend, I was actually suggesting to you through my silence that the best way of freeing yourself from the agony of worldly life is to do as I am doing : sit in a lonely spot, controlling your physical impulses, and meditate on your supreme Self.

"Anyway, I appreciate your query. It is quite relevant. Although many people are now seeking Liberation, they are failing in their search, because they are not quite detached from their sensual leanings.

" My Master taught me, and I am passing on to you what he himself learnt from the scriptural words like ' Buddhi-prasaadaat cha Siva-prasaadaat Guru-prasaadaat purushasya muktiḥ' (by the grace of discerning intellect, of God and of the Teacher man gets Salvation), that if you let your supreme intelligence dwell on the Eternal Spirit, completely detached from physical and mental wanderings, through non-dual devotion to God and devoted service to your teacher, you will be freed from the bondage of the evil effects of your past births ".

OM TAT SAT

MEANS TO SALVATION

Now the question arises whether it is possible for one to obtain at one and the same time all the three things : mental purity, grace of God, and mercy of the blessed Teacher.

While it is true that the three things cannot be obtained with ease at the same time, one can try for them one at a time.

The sages have divided the seekers into three classes—Mridu or Kanishtha (low) ; Manda or Madhyama (middle) ; Teevra or Uttama (noble).

1. The ' Mridu ' class of people find it hard to dissociate themselves from their earthly connections, though they sometimes seek instruction from sacred books and sages.

If these people follow this Gita advice, they will gain mental purity :

Yajña-daana-tapah-karma na tyaajyam kaaryam eva tat
Yajnah daanam tapah cha eva paavanaani maneeshiṇaam

(The clever man — who has not attained perfect liberation from the wordly attachments — must not relinquish his sacred duties of offering sacrificial oblations, giving alms, and doing penance).

Sankaracharya begins his "Aatma Bodha" thus :

Tapobhih ksheeṇa-paapaanaam śaantaanaam veeta-raagiṇaam
Mumukshooṇaam apekshya ayam Aatma-bodhah vidheeyate

(This 'self-knowledge' is intended for the seekers who have driven out their sins through penance, who are of an equable temper, and who are free from all kinds of passion).

Unless you do penance you cannot clean your mind; unless your mind is pure you cannot enjoy peacefulness; and unless you are mentally at peace with yourself you cannot free yourself from the passions and prejudices of everyday life. That is, you must first conquer your six internal enemies before you can win the supramental deliverance.

2. The 'manda' class of people seek liberation even before they cultivate self-restraint.

The 'Manda' does his work dutifully, no doubt, but he divides his time equally between worldly attachments and religious activity.

Such a person need not perform sacrificial rites and the like but it is enough if he pursues the middle path advised by Lord Krishna, along with peacefulness, fearlessness, celibacy, mental restraint, and devotion to God.

He must note these words of Sankaracharya in the book "Aparoksha–anubhooti" (integral experience of divine communion):

Nitya-abhyaasaat ṛte praaptih na bhavet Chit-aatmanah
Tasmaat Brahma-nididhyaase jijnaasuh-śreyase chiram

(None can realise the essence of supreme consciousness without regular meditational practice. Therefore the seeker must always meditate on God in order to attain beatiude).

"Jnaana Vaasishtham" confirms this view :
Yaavat na anugrahah saakshaat jaayate Parameśwaraat
Taavat na sat-gurum kaśchit sat-śaastram vaa api no labhet

(Not until one deserves and receives the grace of God, can one find a good preceptor or a good book to lead one to one's salvation).

3. The people of 'teevra' nature are, by birth, like sage Suka and sage Vaamadeva, free from earthly attachments. For these people the performance of exterior rituals is not necessary or mandatory. All that they have to do is to hear, think over, and meditate upon, the great dicta like "Tat tvam asi" (That thou art).

Paripakvam manah yeshaam kevalah ayam cha siddhidah
Guru-Daivata-bhaktaanaam sarveshaam sulabham javaat

(To such people as are ever devoted to God and Guru, and whose mind is ripe for its higher stage of supramentality God-realisation comes of its own accord before long).

These devotees must spend some time in silent, solitary meditation, telling themselves that their real self is beyond all external attributes and internal superimpositions, and that they are indeed one with the soul of the Blessed Lord.

Śivah anyah tu aham eva anyah pṛthak bhaavam vivarjayet
Yah sthitah "Sah aham" eva iti advaitam bhaavayet sadaa

(Leaving aside the false notion that the Universal Spirit of God and the individual entity of man are different, and realising, that the Universal Self is non-dually reflected in and united with man's individual spirit, man achieves Deliverance).

Yadaa sarve pramuchayante kaamaah ye asya hṛdi śritaah
Atha martyah amṛtah bahavati atra Brahma samaśnute

(When all the desires in the heart of man are driven away, the mortal man accomplishes immortality and realises God here and now).

Immortality is of the soul — not of the body. To become immortal does not mean living for ever but to be released from the bondage of fear (of life and death). 'Abhaya' (fearlessness) is the same as Immortality (Amritam or Amritatvam) and God (*Abhayam vai Brahma*, as the Brihadaaranyaka Upanishat puts it).

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CLASSES OF SEEKERS AFTER TRUTH

The highest kind of seeker is as soft as cotton-wool. Since his innate sensual cravings have vanished, by virtue of his selfless action, perfect devotion and constant meditation done over many former births, he is immediately fit to realise God — after formal initiation by a competent preceptor. Then, just as fire rightaway burns cotton, so does his knowledge burn away ignorance.

The middle kind of seeker is like dry fuel. Just as it is easy to ignite it, so is it easy for this type of devotee to light the flame of knowledge through yogic and spiritual practices.

The low kind of seeker is like wet fuel. Just as the fuel has to be dried before igniting it, so has this type of devotee be made to go through the process of doing the traditional duties as an offering to God.

All the three types must, however, have, in common, compassion for all creation.

Question : But, sir, nowadays we see many holy men sanctioning animal–sacrifice and meat-eating, with the argument that the 'jeeva' (living soul) is undying. How can you reconcile your mercy for all creatures *(bhoota daya)* with this view ?

Answer : Oh what a pity ! One shudders even to hear such words ; then how can one ever sanction such evil ?

Do you say that *"holy men"* express such a view ? Alas, when we see even laymen and the householders are filled with compassion for all living creatures, how unfortunate it is to see the men who should know better stooping to such folly !

There is no need for further comment : for one wonders whether such men are 'holy' or 'unholy' ...

NON-VIOLENCE

Question : Is it true that the wise men are entitled to eat each and every thing, without any sense of 'distinction or non-distinction ?'

Answer : The connotation of having no sense of 'distinction or non-distinction' (bheda-abheda) is far deeper than that related to the people who prey upon their fellow creatures like vultures. That is, would you look upon the vultures who prey upon corpses as wise creatures ? Perhaps the vultures are better than these wise men, for the former are by nature entitled to such food. Men who are wise can sustain themselves by other means than that of killing living creatures. Let posterity beware of such human vultures !

Śloka-ardhena pravakshyaami yat uktam grantha-koṭibhih
Dayaa-samam na-asti puṇyam, paapam himsaa-samam na hi

(I will tell you through just one half-verse what has been said at length by a billion books ; there is no greater virtue than mercy, no worse evil than violence).

This was the opinion of sage Naarada.

Lord Buddha stood by the ancient teaching, "Ahimsaa paramah dharmah" (Non-violence is the greatest moral duty and spiritual righteousness), preached his philosophy of equality among all men and offered 'Nirvaana' (Liberation) to each and every person who practised non-violence. That was why he could make the majority of mankind his followers, at one time.

Karmaṇaa manasaa vaachaa sarva-bhooteshu sarvadaa
Akleśa-jananam proktga tu ahimsaa paramarshibhih

(The great sages have defined 'non-violence' as that attitude which never hurts the feelings of all fellow-creatures — either in thought or by word or by deed).

Ahimsaa paramah dharmah ahimasaa paramam tapah
Ahimsaa paramam daanam iti oochuh munayah tathaa

(The sages say that Non-violence is the highest duty, the greatest penance and the noblest charity).

Praviśanti yathaa nadyah samudram ṛju-vakragaah
Sarva dharmaah ahimsaayaam praviśanti tathaa dṛḍham

(Just as all the rivers, flowing in a straight or crooked fashion, finally join the ocean, so also are all the laws of morality and spirituality definitely included in the observance of non-violence).

Sarva-yajneshu yat daanam, sarva-teertheshu yat phalam
Sarva-daana-phalam vaa api tat na tulyam ahimsayaa

(There is no reward that can match that of non-violence — not that of the alms-giving in all kinds of sacrifices, not that of the visit to all the holy shrines, not even that of all the charities put together).

The Gita says :

Aatma-aupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yah, Arjuna !
Sukham vaa yadi vaa duhkham sah Yogee paramah matah

(He is the greatest yogi who can equate the joy or grief of the others with that of his own, and who thereby treats everyone as he would treat himself).

The Yoga Sootra declares ;

Ahimsaa-pratishṭhaayaam tat sannidhau vaira-tyaagah

(Among the surroundings of the hermitage, wherein the Yogi is fully established in non-violence, even the natural enemies — like cat and mouse — forget their enmity and live happily together).

Again, the Gita asserts :

Ahankaaram balam darpam kaamam krodham cha samśritaah
Maam aatma-para-deheshu pradwishantah abhyasooyakaah

(Those malicious people, who are impelled by self-conceit, brute-strength, pride, lust, and wrath, despise Me who am equally dwelling in them as well as in the others).

God being all-pervading, He resides in the evil people also but since their self-awareness is covered by the veil of ignorance they do not see Him. Actually their evil inclinations so blind them to reality as to make them hate the very God in whom their apparent existence is located.

Taan Aham dwishatah krooraan samsaareshu naraadhamaan
Kshipaami ajasram aśubhaan aasureeshu eva yonishu

(I throw such hateful, cruel, lowly people, again and again into the wombs of devilish creatures — where they will be ever subjected to the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).

Aasureem yonim aapannaah mooḍhaah janmani janmani
Maam apraapya eva, Kaunteya, tatah yaanti adhamaam gatim

(Thus these people who enter the devilish wombs will never be able to realise Me, and at last will be further consigned to lower and lower births like those of worms and insects).

Similarly, the epic, Mahaabhaaratam, and the Manu Smriti, condemn violence, and advocate the regular performance of sacrificial rites, penance and charity.

Besides, human existence is not assured in the future births to those people who indulge in animal-killing.

And we know that the better class of birds and beasts do not support themselves by killing fellow creatures. Naturally, they that do so are shunned by men and are either not allowed near sacred places or driven out into the jungles.

Considering all this, it is a matter of utter shame that the so-called 'Saadhus' permit killing of living creatures for either sacrificial rites or daily food.

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TYPES OF VIOLENCE

Question : But, sir, is there anything under the sun which is not endowed with 'jeeva' (living instinct) ? So is it not equally bad to cut trees and plants, or pluck flowers and leaves, or to eat vegetables ?

Answer : Dear friend, I agree with you — that there is the life-process even in vegetables and leaves and the like. But there is a difference also, at the same time.

Our authority is the sacred texts. None of them has denied the use of vegetarian food. Since the elementary principle of "jeevah jeevasya jeevanam" (one form of life is the means of sustenance to another) permits some sort of mutual dependence for the survival of the creation, we have to make an exception in the case of fruits and vegetables and leaves – that, though they too have life, they are immovable (jada). Like the moving creatures, they do not have sense-organs. Where there are no sense-organs, the feelings of joy and grief are absent. The plant physiology, as propounded by J. C Bose, does not apply to the growth of grain and fruit : it is related to the tree-life.

Let us also take the case of anaesthesia : while the surgery is being performed there is no consciousness on the part of the living individual, when he does not move. Nor do we feel pain when the nails and the hairs are cut. Like the nails and the hairs that grow, the grains and the fruits also grow without apparant feeling of pain or pleasure. Such is not the case with the animals. They have the same sort of organs as we men have. They too enjoy the pleasure of sex, and feel the loss of the life of their kin. The photosynthesis that is behind the growth of animal life is an external agency, whereas the sexual congress of the animals, which is behind their procreation, is akin to ours.

It is chiefly because solar energy is inherent in the growth of farm produce, the light of the sun banishes the dark ignorance of the gentle people who are vegetarians.

The roots and other parts of the trees, even when they are cut, still survive. Not so the animals, when their limbs are cut off.

Even though we may not see the harm that non-vegetarianism causes us in this very existence, we will have to pay for it in future existences or through our warped mental make-up in this very existence, or through our progeny, which inherits the nature of the food the procreating parents eat.

The nature of the food we eat has a direct effect on the nature of our birth-giving 'modes' *(gunas)*. *Sattwa Guṇa* (the noble mode caused by noble food) is conducive to *Jnaana* (knowledge); *Rajo Guṇa* (the mediocre, passionate nature, caused by similar food) provokes the process of enslaving Action; and *Tamo Guṇa* (the dull, ignorant nature, caused by non-vegetarian food) makes for the life of Nescience *(Ajnaanam* or *Avidyaa)*.

The people who eat the sort of food that makes for mental impurity cannot concentrate, in the process of meditation.

If the self-styled "Raaja Yogi" (supreme mystic) is in the habit of drinking liquor and eating meat, one can only call him "Raakshasa Bhogi" (the enjoyer of demoniac pleasures).

Indeed, all the great virtues like the study of scriptures and doing penance will be of no avail to the persons who have such wretched habits.

Like our friend, the pseudo-Yogi, the Raakshasas of Raavana's Lanka were also well-versed in Vedic studies and were performing Vedic rituals with gusto. So Lord Raama hesitated to kill them, when Hanumaan informed him about them. But Sugreeva suggested to Hanuman, by a meaningful glance, to inform Raama about the further truth — which was that the Raakshasas were addicted to drink and non-vegetarianism. Then, since it is the purpose of the godly incarnation to punish the wicked and protect the virtuous, Raama vowed to destroy the Raakshasas.

I regret the need to point out the wrong belief of some Yogis who preach that austere practices are not needed for a man of knowledge ; that, since God made liquor-and-meat-yielding entities, they could be accepted with impunity ; and that, in spite of their external habits, they and their Gurus of old have attained Liberation. These men are like the woman of pleasure, who, when past her youth, still keeps herself busy — in order to fleece the gullible — either by performing a rustic dance or by becoming a 'madam' in a bawdy-house.

ABSTAINING FROM MEAT & LIQUOR

Question : Revered sir, you would appear to be maintaining that those people who refrain from eating meat and drinking liquor are men of knowledge. But we see among many totalitarians and vegetarians — who are predominant among the upper castes and even among some lower castes — persons who are anything but men of knowledge. Then how can they be said to be better men than the alchoholics and the non-vegetarians?

Answer : Dear devotee, you don't seem to have understood the matter properly.

Purity of food alone does not help. It should be followed by sane and sensible living, and mental equilibrium. The food, no doubt, causes the potential nature of the individual ; but unless that potential energy is put to active use it cannot yield the desired results. Purity in eating and drinking merely cleans the physical entity of man but not his subtle body, the real functioning of his mind.

The gross body is purified by means of celibacy, gentle food, and physical Yogic practices. The subtle body is purified by godly devotion : by chanting the sacred syllable, 'AUM', and the like; by solitary living ; by truthfulness ; and by self-restraint.

Dvau kramau chitta-naaśasya Yogah Jnaaanam cha, Raaghava!
Yogah tat-vṛtti-nirodhah hi, Janaanam samyak-avekshaṇam

(There are but two ways to the destruction of mental cravings: ***Yoga***, or the way of austere practices and selfless action, and ***Jnaana***, or knowledge. But while Yoga contributes to mind-control, Knowledge results in immediate Liberation or direct realisation of the Universal Self or God).

Na asti dhyaanam vinaa jnaanam na asti dhyaanam ayoginah
Dhyaanam jnaanam cha yasya asti teerṇah tena bhava-arṇavah

(There is no way of obtaining knowledge without first meditating on the nature of Ultimate Reality, but this meditative power cannot be acquired without austere Yogic practices. He who has mastered meditation and thereby gained knowledge verily crosses the sea of 'samsaara').

The foregoing verse is from Skaanda Puraana.

Knowledge and Detachment are like the two wings of a bird needed for the flight in the sky of Salvation, and these cannot be acquired by mere bodily purity.

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JOY OF VEGETARIANISM

Question : They say that the body which is nurtured by meat-eating would be deprived of its strength if it is denied such nourishment. Is it true, sir ?

Answer : Dear friend, in the first place this body is not nourished by meat.

Normally the child grows on milk, to begin with.

Anyway, now the scientists agree that wheat, cereals and onions have more nutritive qualities than meat.

It is only the false Yogis that propagate the idea that the leaving of meat-eating would make one physically weak and that the abstention from drugs like 'ganja' would cause mental dullness.

Take the case of thieves and murderers. Once they are caught redhanded and jailed, they do not get meat and liquor in the gaol. But do they die thereby ?

The pseudo-monks know in their heart of hearts that what they do and teach is fundmentally wrong, but they are like the lawyers who argue in favour of a case which is unjustifiable on one side : both people are more concerned about pleasure and profit for themselves than about what happens to the others concerned.

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ON EATING THE MEAT 'BOUGHT'

Question : Well, we agree that eating meat is sinful, because it involves the killing of an animal. But what harm is there in eating the meat one simply buys from the market, without actually taking part in the process of killing the animal ?

Answer : No sir. Don't you see that it is only because there are men who are going to patronise them that the butchers go about their business ?

That is why the 'Saanti Parvam' in the *Mahaabhaaratam* says that the eaters of the meat are worse sinners than the killers of the animal.

We may also consider the example of legal justice. The men who hire killers to perpetrate the murder of their enemies or rivals are awarded greater punishment in some cases than those who actually do the killing.

Never mind the talk of 'sin'. As noted, meat-eating adversely affects the senses and makes them dull (taamasika). Such people are more prone to sensual aberrations than the others.

Please listen to what the Gita says :

Dhyaayatah vishayaan pumsah sangah teshu upajaayate
Sangaat sanjaayate kaamah kaamaat krodhah abhijaayate

(People whose mind constantly dwells on sensual allurements get themselves inextricably attached to them ; by such attachment their desire for fulfilment of the sensual impulses is increased ; if such fulfilment is not always forthcoming, they are beset by anger).

Krodhaat bhavati sammohah sammohaat smṛti-vibhramah
Smṛti-bhramśaat budhi-naaśah budhi-naaśaat praṇaśyati

(From anger arises self-delusion ; from self-delusion, self-forgetfulnes ; from self-forgetfulness, loss of intellect ; and because of the loss of intellect, the individual is morally destroyed).

To support the theory that it is the eaters of faulty food that are more likely to be the slaves of their senses, we have the additional scriptural authority :

Anna-doshena chittasya kaalushyam sarvadaa bhavet
Kalushee-kṛta-chittaanaam Dharmah samayak na bhaasate

(By eating the wrong kind of food man's mind is besmirched. To the besmirched mind the nature of Dharma — righteousness or spiritual and moral Duty — never becomes intelligible).

Aahaara-śuddhau sattva-śuddhih, sattva-śuddhau dhruvaa smṛtih
Smṛti-laabhe sarva-grantheenaam vipramokshah

(By means of pure food the mental purity is ensured; the pure mind retains the right memory of true knowledge ; and this memory of true knowledge leads to the dissolution of all the ties of earthly attachment and to the eventual perfect Liberation).

USES OF GOATS AND CHICKENS

Question : Sir, if the goats and the fowls cannot be made use of by man for his nourishment, why did God create them ?

Answer : O virtuous friend, why didn't you ask that for what purpose did God create men if they are not useful to the goats and the fowls ?

Even if you do not grant this mutual equality of men and beasts, you have to accept the fact the latter too love their own lives and like to enjoy the fruits of bountiful nature all around them. They are not created for man's enjoyment or nourishment.

Besides, the animals are helpful to man in many other ways. As you see, the herd of goats helps agricultural operations. Their milk is also drunk by many humans. The wool of the sheep keeps man warm.

What does the sinful man do for the dumb creatures ?

It is only to punish such sinners that God incarnates Himself in every age. Mother Earth, in the Padma Puraanam, laments that she does not mind the weight of the mighty mountains, the giant trees and the like, but she cannot bear the burden of sinful ungrateful men.

Indeed how can we forget these famous verses from the Gita ?

Yadaa yadaa hi dharmasya glaanih bhavati, Bhaarata !
Abhyutthaanam adharmasya tadaa aatmaanam sṛjaami Aham
Paritraaṇaaya saadhoonaam vinaaśaaya cha dushkṛtaam
Dharma-samsthaapana-arthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge

(Whenever Dharma is in danger, and Adharma— evil — is on the ascendent, I create Myself in the form of a noble incarnation to protect the righteous and punish the wicked, in every age).

Although the ways of the Almighty are mysterious, you may rest assured that in some way or the other the sinners are always being punished and the virtuous are being rewarded.

So may you not sin by killing, or encouraging to kill, any fellow creature !

Question : As you say, the sheep and the goats may be useful to man. But of what use can be the fowls ?

Answer : Oh, but they too live in families like ours and enjoy life in their own way.

And don't you know that they are the best time-keepers ? The watch-machine may fail or the alarum clock may not work, but the cock always heralds the dawn unfailingly. Unlike the disturbingly noisy alarum clock, their crowing is sweet to the ear, and they repeat their crowing till the lazybones wakes up in time to begin his or her daily duty.

We see these little birds cleaning our yards, killing the poisonous worms, and in ever so many ways being the friends of men.

Like the dog, the cock is also a friend of man. It is as bad to eat the one as the other.

USES OF FISH

Question : Sir, you may be right about goats and fowls. But why cannot one eat the fish, which do not seem to help our environment in any manner ?

Answer : Friend, they too lead a conscious life like men. They keep the water clean by eating the poisonous germs.

Frogs also serve the same purpose. Why does not man eat them ? Is it not as bad to eat the fish ?

If you carry too far your logic of the big fish eating the small fish as a law of nature, or that might is right in the ultimate analysis, you must allow the tigers the freedom to eat men. You must let the lion and the tiger use the same sort of logic : man and the other beasts are made for the nourishment of the lions and the tigers !

Above all, remember :

Aahaara-nidraa-bhaya-maithunam cha
Saamaanyam etat paśubhih naraaṇaam
Jnaanam naraaṇaam adhikah viśeshah
Jnaanena heenah paśubhih samaanah

(Food, sleep, fear and the sex-act are common to man and the beast. The only thing that distinguishes man from the beast is his Knowledge. So he who is devoid of true knowledge is the equal of the beast), says Uttara Geetaa.

This knowledge is to treat every other living creature like oneself, for, after all, even the beasts have the 'knowledge' of signs and cries. They have their mating calls; the young cry out for the help of their elders when in danger. Sage Patanjali says that the true Yogi can understand the language of every living creature. If the ordinary mortals cannot understand the language of the beasts, it is no reason for their claim of superiority.

And so let every human being treat the non-human living beings as he would like those creatures to treat him.

Om Tat Sat
End of Part I

PART II

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE TEACHER & THE TAUGHT

Question : In order to attain self-knowledge, is it enough for the seeker to have the noble qualities of self-restraint and the sincere desire for liberation, along with detachment ? Or does he need the guidance of a teacher ? Kindly enlighten me, sir !

Answer : My dear, good friend, this study of God and of God-realisation generally finds fulfilment only when the disciple has mastered the four qualifications needed as means to Self-knowledge (*saadhana chatushtaya :* the ability to distinguish between the eternal and the transitory; the renunciation of the benefits of this world and of the other world as well; self-restraint, mentally as well as physically; and the sincere wish for Liberation), and the teacher is a fully realised soul, with the perfect understanding of the scriptural message of the unity of the cosmic person and the supracosmic Absolute.

The merit of the disciple is akin to the cleaning and the ploughing of the field before it is seeded and fertilised.

The perfect understanding of the teacher may be compared to the technical knowledge of, say, the telegraphic code. Unless the one who sends the message and the one who receives it at the other end have practical knowledge of the code, the message will be unintelligible to both.

Similarly, the teacher must have theoretical and practical knowledge of God-realisation.

The medicine prescribed by the physician comes of the perfect knowledge of its efficacy, which he has already gained. And the wise patient makes proper use of the medicine, obser-

ving proper diet. Like such wise physician and such wise patient, are the qualified teacher and the earnest disciple, who *fulfil* the respective function of each in its entirety.

And the Upanishat categorically advises the pupil :

Tat-vijanaana-artham śaantah daantah Sat-gurum eva
abhigacchet samit-paaṇih śrotriyam Brahma-nishṭham

(In order to understand the Ultimate Reality, the disciple, mastering internal and external self-control, and carrying a piece of wood — or an offering as a mark of obedience to the teacher — must approach a great Master who is well-versed in the scriptures and who is well-established in God-consciousness).

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NATURE OF TEACHER

Avidyaa-hṛdaya-granthi-bandha-mokshah bhavet yatah
Tam eva Guruh iti aahuh Guru-śabda-artha-vedinah

(The wise men who know the real meaning of the word 'Guru' say that he is a worthy Teacher, by means of whose instruction the disciple is liberated from the knots of ignorance that bind his 'heart of Nescience'),

'Gu' sabdah tu andhakaarah syaat 'ru' śabdah tat-nirodhakah
Andhakaara-nirodhitvaat 'Guruh' iti abhidheeyate

(The letters 'Gu' stand for the darkness of ignorance; and the letters 'ru' symbolise the dispelling of that darkness. Since he is the dispeller of the darkness of igonrance, the Teacher is called 'Guruh').

Gukaarah cha andhakaarah hi Rukaarah tejah uchyate
Ajnaana-graasakam Brahma Guruh eva na samśayah

('Gu' is darkness, and 'ru' is light; the light that drives away the darkness of ignorance is indeed the godlike Guru).

Gukaarah cha guṇa-ateetah roopa-ateetah Rukaarah
Guṇa-roopa-viheenatvaat Guruh iti abhidheeyate

('Gu' represents the quality beyond the 'modal nature', and 'ru', that beyond name and form. Since he is over and above the limitations of the modes, names and forms, the teacher is named 'Guru').

Chaaturyavaan vivekee cha adhyaatma-jnaanavaan śuchih
Maanasam nirmalam yasya gurutvam tasya śobhate

(The teachership of that teacher shines, who is skilful, diligent, learned in philosophy, blameless and mentally pure).

Guravah nirmalaah śaantaah saadhavah mita-bhaashiṇah
Kaama-krodha-vinirmuktaah sadaachaaraah jitendriyaah

(The teachers are they who are pure, peaceful, gentle, reticent, free from lust and wrath; who observe the traditional practices; and who control their senses).

Aachaaryah Veda-sampannah Vishṇu-bhaktah vimatsarah
Yogajnah yoga-nishṭhah cha sadaa yoga-aatmakah śuchih

(The preceptor is he who is well-versed in Vedic study, a devotee of God, without vanity, skilled in Yogic theory and practice, ever in communion with the Absolute, and pure at heart).

NATURE OF THE DISCIPLE

Upadeśa-kramah, Raama, vyavasthaa-maatra-paalanam
Jnaanasya kaaraṇam śuddhaa śishya-prajnaa eva kevalaa

(The teacher's instruction is merely formal, in keeping with tradition, but the real source of knowledge is the pure, bright and own understanding of the disciple alone).

The foregoing verse was taught to Raama by Vasishtha in the book "Yoga Vaasishtham".

Ajnaana-moola-haraṇam janma-karma-nivaaraṇam
Jnaana-vairaagya siddhi-artham Guru-paada-udakam pibet

(The student must be strictly prepared to imbibe every single word of his teacher's instruction — literally, "drink the water with which he washes his teacher's feet" –, because such service to the teacher begets the wisdom that is the means of cutting off the root of Nescience, of removing the chances of rebirth and self-enslaving action, and of achieving Knowledge and Renunciation).

The Mundaka Upanishat, quoted earlier, to denote the need of the disciple to approach the teacher, continues :

Tasmai sah vidvaan upapannaaya samyak, prasaanta-chittaaya samaanvitaaya, yena Aksharam Purusham veda Satyam, provaacha taam tattwatah Brahma-vidyaam.

(Then the teacher convincingly inparted the God-knowledge— through which one can truthfully realise the Eternal Godhead — to the disciple who has dutifully approached him, with a peaceful mind and with internal self–restraint),

Chaaturvarṇye tu sanjaatah śaastra-jnaana-niroopakah
Bhakti-jnaana-viraageṇa buddhimaan neetimaan sadaa
Purushaartha-pravaktaa cha sadaa nirṇaya-buddhimaan
Śuśrooshaayaam cha kuśalah guru-kaarye prayatnavaan
Santatam guru-śuśrooshaa vaak-ullanghana-bheerukah
Etat lakshaṇa-sampannah sah śishyah parikeertitah

(He is a worthy student — who, no matter in whatever community he is born, is able to learn with sincerity the precepts of the sacred books; endowed with devotion, knowledge and detachment; wise and ever obedient to the moral law; able to stand by the apportioned duty; cleverly determined; always eager to do the teacher's bidding; and afraid of breaking his word).

Amadyapaah tu ye śoodraah śaucha-aachaara-kriyaa-aadaraah
Śiva-bhaktaah cha eteshaam deekshaa kaaryaa na anyathaa

(Even to the men of a low caste – as long as they refrain from drinking liquor, are devoted to the performance of the pure traditional practices, and are sincere devotees of God — may be imparted divine knowledge).

Sarveshaam eva śishyaaṇaam adhikam śata-guṇam śṛṇu
Bhaktih viśwaasah adrohah guru-aajnaa-paalana-sthitih
Śraddhaa śaantih kshamaa satyam tathaa śaucham tapah srutam
Kṛtajnataa dwaadaśakam yasya śishyasya vidyate
Sishyaaṇaam cha Pradhaanah cha na anye te hi pradhaanakaah

(Among the students the one who has these twelve qualities is said to be a hundred times better than the others: devotion, faith, absence of deceit, obedience to the teacher, dedication, peacefulness, forbearance, truthfulness, purity, consecration, interest in scriptures, and gratitude).

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The following question is put by the great devotee, Naaraayanamma : Revered sir, I am sincerely searching for a way out of the snare of 'samsaara', but whomsoever I approach for the initiation in the study that would enable me to find that way, I am told that women are born of sin and are unfit to learn the scriptures.

Is it right that one half of humanity, and the mothers of all mankind, should be relegated to such an unworthy status ?

Answer : Beloved mother, I am immensely delighted with your sincere words. Till now you have suffered as a result of the actions of your former births. Now God has granted you the state of mind that will free you from your bondage to the earthly ties.

As regards your question, I assure you with all the authority at my command that women have as much right to learn about God and to study the scriptures as have the men.

The question of merit depends upon the mentality, but not on the sex or the caste or the creed of the individual concerned. Just as the men and the women have the equal right to enjoy the external beauty of the world of God so also have they the equal right to learn the sacred word of God.

We have the supreme examples of Paarvati being initiated in the mysteries of mysticism and metaphysics by Lord Shiva, and of Mother Earth (Bhoodevi) being similarly taught by Lord Vishnu.

Is it not Saraswati, the goddess of education, who is prayed to by the male Trinity of gods themselves — not to speak of the entire order of demi-gods and mankind in general ?

Have not sage Yaajnavalkya to his wife Maitreyi, and sage Kapila to his mother Devahooti, imparted the knowledge of the Absolute ?

Has not sage Matanga made the humble Sabari a woman of knowledge ?

It was the woman, Choodaala, who taught philosophical truths to her husband Sikhadhwaja.

The great nun, Sulabha, queried the great philosopher-king Janaka about eternal verities.

We have had a myriad women saints and devotees like Meera Bai and Sakku Bai.

Among the Vaishnavaite Aalwaars is the great devotee Aandaal (Godaa Devi), and among the Shaivite Naayanaars are the saintly Mahilaa Naayakiyamma and Kaarakkaalamma.

In our own midst we have the blessed lady Tarigonda Venkamaamba.

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had a woman as his Guru, and treated his own wife, Saardaambaa, as his goddess.

Swami Vivekananda had the famous English disciple, Sister Nivedita, who established several educational institutions in our country, besides learning the truths of our perennial philosophy.

Even in physical culture women like Saandu Taaraa Baai proved themselves to be the equals of men.

Mrs. Annie Besant has interpreted our scriptures as capably as any Hindu sage did, and had among her disciples many Brahmin scholars, too.

There is no need to amplify the list by citing more names of the great women who have learnt the divine arts as efficiently as men did.

Viewing all this, one can only conclude that it was the pure concern of men about the denial of sensual pleasure by women, if the latter learn the philosophical truths, that was at the root of the denial of God-knowledge and scriptural study to the women, by men.

Verily, if the women have the right to cure themselves of the physical diseases, so have they the right to cure themselves of the spiritual bondage, through scriptural study.

It is said that for the sake of women and the lower castes the scriptural truths have been offered through the epics. But this view does not hold water, if we realise that the message of the fundamental divinity of the human spirit is equally conveyed by the scriptures and the epics, and if we ramember that at least twenty-seven women authored some of the Vedic mantras.

At all events, the prerequisite of 'saadhana chatushtaya sampatti', as defined earlier, is indispensable to both men and women, in their pursuit of 'God-knowledge' (Brahma Vidyaa).

Now, viewed from the biological standpoint also, woman needs to have knowledge more than man. The reason is that it is the hand that rocks the cradle that rules the world, in the sense each child starts life not only from the mother's womb but also receives the very initiation into life, as it is the mother who has the care of the child in every way. Although in later years, the children come under the influence of the father also, even then the men are so busy with their business of earning the daily bread that they have little time to nurture the growing mind of their children.

Our epics and classics inform us how in all ages the learned mothers have trained their children to live in the ways of God. Since the lullaby the mother sings has an influence on the child's brain, is it not preferable to render the age-old ones which have a purely devotional content? The modern woman seems to be more proficient in singing the raucous romatic stuff which the mass media dish out than in the soulful traditional lullabies and ballads. Thus, if only to exercise the beneficial influence on the formative years of man's life, woman needs to be imparted the knowledge of the Supreme Self.

It is also well known that as the thoughts of the pregnant mother so is the embryo developed in its conscious part of gestation. Apart from Abhimanyu, there was Prahlaada who, though he belonged to the demoniac parentage, could imbibe the divine

knowledge, thanks to the instruction his mother received from sage Naarada when she was pregnant. Since the foetus is influenced by the state of the expecting mother's mind, it has been traditionally stressed that everyone should contribute to the peace of mind and the general well-being of a pregnant woman.

Swami Vivekananda also declared that his mind had been developed in consonance with the conception of his mother, which took place after she visited the holy place, Varanasi, and prayed Lord Shiva for the gift of a son's birth...

In this connection I should like to quote a story I read in the magazine, "Divya Jnaana Deepika".

In England there was a boy who had a poor mother. Since childhood he was in the habit of hurting his fellow-children and of killing the dumb creatures. When he grew up he did not stop at killing animals, but carrying a knife with him all the time, he used to kill human beings also whenever he had the chance. All this mischief was done without any motive at all. When he was caught redhanded and tried in a court of law, the judge found out that he was not strictly responsible for his wild actions and that there was something wrong with his heredity. So he was not awarded any punishment, but instead kept in the charge of a doctor who discovered that he had a mother who was employed at a slaughter-house where her work comprised the holding in check of the animals that were to be butchered, the cleaning of the hide of the killed animal and similar evil practices. She confessed to the analyst that her mind was always preoccupied with the thoughts about her work and she was actually looking forward to the next day's butchery even in her dreams. Therefore the psychologist decided that her son inherited his mother's mentality at the time she was carrying him in her womb.

We also learn that the mare in rut is mated with a stallion which is of a high breed. Even when the mare is mated with an ordinary horse, she would be first shown a stallion of great quality and then united with the other horse, with her eyes tied up.

If even the animals are bred in this careful fashion, keeping in mind the importance of breeding, is it not all the more reason why

human beihgs should carefully train and educate their mothers with all respect for their birthright of self-knowledge? Indeed, the treatment of women as mere chattel has been the bane of India for several centuries. It is our bounden duty to restore to the women the noble status they enjoyed in ancient times—if only for the good reason that the men born of them would be worthy members of society, for, as proved beyond doubt, it is the mother that makes the man, in every sense of the term.

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NO AUSPICIOUS TIME NEEDED FOR MEDITATION

A Lady's Question : Revered father, a doubt has been bothering me for a long time. I cannot think of a better person than you to resolve it. May I perform my meditational practice during the monthly period?

Answer : Indeed, this is an important doubt, which assails the mind of every woman.

This sort of thing, however, bothers only those persons who are on the physical level of consciousness. When one's mind reaches the plane of the supreme self, such doubts do not arise. The soul is ever pure, and since meditation is concerned with the soul it need not be bothered about such mundane considerations and can be performed whenever the mind is clean.

Of course, there are various opinions and different authorities on the subject.

The fact is, in taking into account the sacred laws, we have to distinguish between the "Karma Kaanda" (the path of Action) and the "Jnaana Kaanda" (the path of knowledge). The matters related to the former may not be done during the monthly period, but those concerning Meditation can always be done. For God is eternally dwelling in the mind and heart and soul of human beings, and to keep oneself aware of him there is no question of any particular time being auspicious or otherwise.

The prayerful actions surrounding idol-worship and the like belong to the world of quality; here there are certain traditional taboos which have to be respected, because they are meant to train the mind in a well-regulated fashion. Such external devotional observances have to be eschewed during menstruation.

Indeed, if meditation is prohibited during the 'period' there is a great danger. In the Gita the Lord warned us to keep him in mind all the time, so that at the time of departure from this life the transmigrating soul entertains worthy thoughts (which lead to corresponding rebirth). So, if by mischance, the woman devotee departs this life during the inconvenient period, she runs the risk

of an unworthy reincarnation. That is why in the philosophical texts meditation has been advocated without any great stress on the physical condition of the meditator. If one does not carry the logic of it too far, one may agree that in this particular case the purity of the body is unimportant and all that is needed is the purity of the soul.

Just as the sun is not contaminated by the impure waters which reflect it, so also is not the supracosmic soul affected by the impure body which meditates on it.

Now please learn the truth about the Universal Self, and you will realise that the wordly distinctions do not touch it.

Yathā prakāśayati Ekah kṛtsnam lokam imam Ravih
Kshetram Kshetrī tathā kṛtsnam prakāśayati, Bhārata

(Just as the single sun provides heat and light for the whole world, so too does the indwelling single spirit of God activate the entire creation).

Kshetra-Kshetrajñayoh evam antaram jñāna-chakshushā
Bhūta-Prakṛti-Moksham ye viduh yānti te Parăm

(They that thus perceive the distinction between the individual creature and the cosmic Self, as well as the resultant means to the liberation of the cosmic soul from the individual entity of physical nature, would attain to the Supreme).

The idea is, the function of meditation at the cosmic level has to be separated from the action on the physical plane.

Tatra evam sati kartāram ātmānam kevalam tu yah
Paśyati akṛta-buddhitvāt na sah paśyati durmatih

(That being so, he who does not take into consideration the five factors that go together to make up the human entity, but thinks that he himself is the sole agent or that the universal soul without its manifest conjunction with the individual Nature is the real cause of creation, may be said to be the man of perverse intellect who cannot see the reality of the mutuality between the creative principle and the creation).

To these words of Lord Krishna may be added this verse from Sankaracharya's "Viveka-choodaamanih".

Dehah aham iti eva jaḍasya buddhih
Dehe cha jīve viduṣah tu aham-dhī
Viveka-vijñānavatah mahātmanah
Brahmā aham iti eva matih sadā ātmani

(To the dunce his body would appear to be himself; to the average man the ego seems to be his real self; but to the wise man who can distinguish between truth and untruth ever appears the realisation that his true self is one with the Universal Self).

King Janaka receives this instruction in "Siddha Geetaa":

Sā kāla-sūtra-padavī sā mahā-vīchi-vāgurā
Sā asi-patra-vana-śreṇī dehah aham iti yā matih

(The thought that 'I am the body' is the rope of the Lord of Death; the bondage of 'samsaara', and the sword that hangs over one's head).

To go back to the Gita :

Yam yam vā api smaran bhāvam tyajati ante kalebaram
Tam tam eva ati, Kaunteya !, sadā tat-bhāva-bhāvitah

(Whatevet thoughts constantly occupy one's mind, they cannot be avoided at the last moment of life, and with what thoughts one departs this life the individual enters the next birth that corresponds to their nature).

So it is incumbent on the wise man (and the wise woman) to keep meditating on God all the time, for otherwise at the time of death such thoughts do not come to mind. Just before death, only the subconscious functions, and since the conscious effort then is ineffective, the long training that the ego had all through life gets the better of any well-meaning advice the individual gets at the end of his life.

That is why the Lord reiterates :

Tasmāt sarveshu kāleshu Mām eva anusmara (therefore at all times think of me only).

Note the words "at all times", and your doubt will be finally and firmly dispelled.

Now, with regard to the kind of meditation you must launch upon, here is what *Chaanakya Smriti* advises.

Sakārena bahih yāti Hakārena viśet punah
Hamsa Hamsa iti mantram jīvah japati sarvadā

(The eternal chant of "SO'HAM" —— He am I — keeps repeating itself ceaselessly, with the 'Sah' going out when the mouth is opened, and the 'Aham' coming in when the lips are closed during their utterance).

Where the realised soul knows this mystery of the eternal 'Hamsa Gaayatree', the ignoramus, on account of his bodily self-identification, is unable to discover it.

Atyanta malinah dehah, Dehi tu atyanta nirmalah
Ubhayoh antaram jñātvā kasya śaucham vidhiyate ?

(The physical entity of man, made up of the five elemental forces, is full of congenital uncleanliness, whereas the life-giving energy behind its consciousness is eternally pure. Thus, strictly speaking, all outward cleaning of the body or of the mind is meaningless).

The point is that self-realisation should come from within, by looking inwards with pure consciousness, but not by means of any kind of outward cleaning process. Meditation is always inwards, and all other practices are directed outwards. So every living soul anxious to realise himself or herself should be encouraged to pursue soul-knowledge.

Sarveṣām eva śauchānām artha-śaucham param smṛam
Yah arthe śuchih sah tu śuchih na mṛit-vāri-śuchih śuchih

(Of all processes of purification, that of the mental essence is the most important. He who is mentally pure is really purified — not he who just washes himself with water and soap).

Vaachaam śaucham cha manasah śaucham indriya-nigrahah
Sarva-bhoota-dayaa śaucham etat śaucham paraarthinaam

(To the seekers after Truth, the real purification is that of speech, of the mind, of the control of senses, and of the kind attitude towards all creation).

Jnaana-śaucham parityajya baahye yah ramate narah
Sah moodhah kaanchanam tyaktvaa loshtam gṛhnaati,
Suvrata !

(The man who indulges in external cleanliness, without attempting the purification of his wisdom, is like the man who forsakes gold in favour of clod).

Rati-antare mootra-pureeshayoh vaa
Chandaala-veśmani athavaa śmaśaane
Kṛta-prayatnah api akṛta-prayatnah
Sadaa smaret Keśava-naamadheyam

(One must for ever keep chanting the name of God — no matter whether one is engaged in the sex-act or in easing one-self; or whether one is seated in the home of an outcaste or in the burial-ground; or whether one fulfils or does not fulfil one's prescribed daily duty).

No deśa-kaala-niyamah śaucha-aśaucha vinirnayah
Param samkeertanaat eva 'Raama, Raama' iti muchyate

(Irrespective of the time or the place, or of the fact of being clean or otherwise, if one chants the sacred name of Raama with complete detachment, one is fit for Salvation).

Śuchih vaa api aśuchih vaa api yah japet Pranavam sadaa
Sah na lipyati paapena padma-patram iva ambhasaa

(Whether one is physically pure or impure, as long one constantly chants the sacred syllable 'AUM', the reciter is as unattached to sin as is the lotus-leaf to the water in it).

Apavitrah pavitrah vaa sarva-avasthaam-gatah api vaa
Yah smaret Puṇḍareekaaksham sah baahya-abhyantarah śuchih

(Whether clean or unclean, or whether immersed in several mundane functions or activites, he who meditates on God constantly may be regarded as one who is both internally and externally pure).

This would convince you that the women during their period or confinement or any other physically inconvenient state are entitled to meditate on God and derive the benefit therefrom.

Sarva-dharmaan parityajya Maam ekam śaraṇam vraja
Aham tvaa sarva pāpebhyah mokshayishyaami maa śuchah

(Leaving aside all the effects of all kinds of duty, seek refuge in Me with sincere devotion; then I will release you from your bondage to works and from the consequent ill-effects or sins).

The preceding verse is well-known from the Gita.

The "Siva Geeta" says :

Vidhinaa avidhinaa vaa api bhaktyaa ye Maam upaasate
Tebhyah phalam prayacchāmi prasannah Aham na samśayah

(Either in a regulated fashion or otherwise, so long as I am prayed to with convincing devotion, I shall be pleased with it and shall reward the devotees with due grace).

Dehah-aham-maana-paaśena dṛḍham baddhah asi sarvatah
Bodhah-aham-jnaana-khaḍgena tat nikṛtya sukhee bhava

(You are tied up all around by the rope of the thought "I am my body"; be happy by cutting off those bonds with the sword of the knowledge of 'God am I').

The foregoing is the instruction given to Raama by sage Vasishtha.

Again it must be clarified that all the above-mentioned latitude is allowed only to the seekers who are near the goal, but not to the novices. The uninitiated and the beginners should always keep their body and mind clean before they can think of dispensing with such external purity.

Brahmachaaree grihasthah vaa vaanaprasthah athavaa yatih
Naaree vaa vṛshalah vaa api pakvah Brahma vichaarayet

(Whether a bachelor or a householder, whether living with the spouse in sexual detachment and in retirement or a renouncer, whether a woman or a low-caste man, one must contemplate on God, only after one is fully ready, through previous devotional practices, for knowing Him).

The 'Sanatkumaara Samhitaa' says :

Yogaadhikaariṇah sarve Praaṇinah sarvadaa yatah
Baalah vṛddhah vyaadhiyuktah yuvaa stree śoodra-janmabhṛt

(Whether one is a child or an aged man or a diseased person or a young man or a woman or a low-born person – all have the equal right to pursue Yogic practices).

Lord Krishna's words are familiar :

Maam hi, Paartha, vyapaaśritya ye api syuh paapa-yonayah
Striyah vaiśyaah tathaa śoodraah te api yaanti paraam gatim

(As long as they are truly devoted to Me, even the people born of the evil effects of former births – like women, merchants and labourers — attain to the supreme status of God).

The 'Yoga Saastram' asseverates :

Maitreyee Sulabhaa Śaarjnee Śaanḍilee cha tapasvinee
Ete cha anye cha bahavah neecha-yoni-gataah api
Jnaana-nishṭhaam paraam praaptaah

(The women saints like Maitreyi, Sulabha, Sarangi and Sandili, besides many devotees born of low caste, have attained the right to knowledge through their constant devotion and meditation).

Sankalpa-vaasanaa jaalaih swaire vaa yaati bandhanam
Manah laalaa-mayaih bandhaih kośakaara-krimih yathaa

(Like the silkworm that weaves the web in which it is caught and dead, so do the men by themselves set the trap of *'samsaara'* into which they fall, because of their attachment to the heritage of the bodily remembrances and effects of the myriad former births).

Na aham duhkhee na me dehah bandhah kah asti aatmanah sthitih
Iti bhaavanaaroopeṇa vyavahaareṇa muchyate

("I am not a miserable person, nor am the physical body; how can I be enslaved, I who am part and parcel of the everlasting self" ? Such thoughts make a man free from *'samsaara'*).

The last two *Slokas* are from "Yoga Vaasishtham"

Aatma-anaatma-vichaareṇa munih muchyeta bandhanaat
Tat vinaa janma-koṭyaa api bandha-chhedah na sidhyati

(By distinguishing between what is the real self and what is the bodily entity, and by identifying with the soul and not with the body, one obtains liberation. Without this discriminative power there is no salvation for him, even after a billion rebirths).

Ajnaana-sarpa-dashṭasya Brahma-jnaana-aushadham vinaa
Kim u Vedaih cha śaastraih cha kim u mantraiah kim aushadhaih

(To the man bitten by the snake of ignorance the only remedy is the knowledge of God or Self. Of what avail to him are the scriptures or the sacred books or the *mantras* or the medicinal herbs ?).

And so, noble lady, you heard me establishing your freedom to meditate at all times, since the Soul is not bound by the worldly

matters like a physical deviation. Now I will drive home the point at issue through a catechism. Please answer me carefully.

Question : To whom belong the ornaments round your neck ?

Answer : They are mine.

Question : So you and your ornaments are separate from each other, aren't they ?

Answer : Yes, sir.

Question : Whose is your body ?

Answer : Mine.

Question : When you say something is 'mine', it means you are referring to a possession of yours which is different from yourself. So don't you agree that the real you and your body are two different entities ?

Answer : I do agree, sir.

Question : Now I ask you, to whom do your active and cognitive sense organs belong ?

Answer : They are all mine, sir.

Question : How do you know that they are yours ?

Answer : By means of my mind.

Question : I know your particular mind is pure. But, in general, the mind is fickle. Anyway, how did you find out that you learn through your mind ?

Answer : Since there is an intellect *(buddhi)* which is behind the functioning of the mind, I think I know about the body and the entire external world by means of the working of the mind.

Question : Good. But how could you learn that there is an intellect which makes the mind work and grasp everything?

Answer : Because there is a Supreme Self over and above this intellect, which Supreme Self is the real 'I'.

Question : Very good, indeed. But how did you know that your self is one with the Supreme Self ?

Answer : Because there is nothing beyond the Absolute, Supreme Self, which is self-existent and self-resplendent.

Question : That is absolutely right. And yet, you have been formerly talking about two different things — you and yours; now you have come to the conclusion that you are self-shining and that the Supreme Self is the one and only source of all knowledge. So, as you see, your real self, indeed, is none but the Supracosmic Self.

Answer : Thank you, sir, for slowly guiding me to the realisation that the real 'I' in me is the witness of everything, the self-effulgent Ultimate Reality.

Now then, dear lady, you will be able to grasp the full meaning of what I am about to reiterate.

"What you call the 'I' in you is the "Pratyak-aatmaa", the *separate soul,* as it literally means. This is also the "Jeevaatmaa", the soul of the individual living entity, relating to 'Tvam' or "Thou". The causative reality that is reflected by your individual existence is 'Tat' or 'That' (Universal Self). Now through this catechism you have become ('asi) one with that Absolute Self. That is to say, *'Tat' (that* Real Self*) 'tvam' (thou* individual self*) 'asi'* (art) or "your individual self and the universal self are one and the same", which is the import of the 'Mahaa-vaakyam' (great dictum) from Chhaandogya Upanishat (Saama Veda). So forget your old identity with the physical things and forces, and realise that since everything is located in the Aatman you are also an integral part of it.

Even if at first you find it difficult to achieve such full self-identification with the Absolute, you should at least seat yourself in the *'Siddha Aasana'* (a Yogic posture) and meditate on the Supreme, chanting the *'Praṇava Mantra'* (AUM). Gradually you must

develop the awareness that the AUM is the symbol of the Ultimate Reality (Paramaatmaa) and that you yourself are going to be spiritually unioned with that transcendent consciousness.

This is the instruction concerning God (Brahma-Upadesah). When you live up to this instruction in all its entirety, go and preach it to the wide world, making no distinction between man and man or man and woman. Everyone who is sincerely desirous of learning the truth about himself or herself is entitled to God-realisation and you must share your bliss with the like-minded seekers.

"Neti Neti iti Neti iti Neti iti yat param padam
Niraakartum aśaktatvaat Tat asmi iti sukhee bhava

(When all else is rejected, because of the mutual dependence of cause and effect, the One that remains is the Uncaused Cause, of which the whole universe is the unattached Effect. Since one is not, in the physical form, either the cause or the effect of creation, one should identify oneself with that ever-remaining One. In such self-identity with the One Self, one finds eternal happiness).

Aatmaanam santatam Brahma viddhi cha ekam nirantaram
Aham dhyaataa param dhyeyam akhanḍam khanḍase katham?

(Know yourself as one with the sole indivisible Absolute Brahman : indeed, how can you separate this inseparable Self with the false notion that you the meditator and He that is meditated upon are two different entities?).

So says the Yoga Vaasishtham.

Indriyaaṇi paraaṇi aahuh indriyebhyah param manah
Manasah tu paraa buddhih yah buddheh paratah tu Sah

(It is said that the senses are mighty; mightier than the senses is the mind; mightier than the mind is the Intellect; and that which is even mightier than the Intellect is the Self).

That was the Gita.

Here is the Katha Upanishad's version :

Indriyebhyah paraah hi arthaah arthebhyah cha param manah
Manasah tu paraa buddhih buddheh Aatmaa mahaan parah

(The sensuous functions are subtler than the senses; the mind is subtler than the sensuous functions; the Intellect is superior to the mind; and greater than the Intellect is the Ego called Mahat).

Mahatah param Avyaktam Avyaktaat Purushah parah
Purushaat na param kinchit saa kaashṭhaa saa paraa gatih

(Greater than the Ego is the Unmanifest; mightier than the Unmanifest is the Supreme Self — literally 'Person'; beyond this Supreme Person, which is the Ultimate Reality and the Final Goal of all mentation and creation, there is nothing to be known).

This final state of self-realisation is variously known as *'Kaivalya'* (Sole reality or Union with the One); *'Moksha'* (Liberation); *'Amanaska'* (Supramental Trance) ; *Achala Paripoornataa* (Perfect immovability), *'Sahaja-aananda Raaja-yoga'* (Natural Bliss in Mystic Communion), etc.

Eshah sarveshu bhooteshu gooḍhah Aatmaa na prakaaśate
Dṛśyate tu agryayaa buddhyaa sookshmayaa sookshma-darśibhih

(This all-pervasive Self, immanent in all creation, cannot be seen by the naked eye, but the realised souls can see it with the clairvoyant vision of their subtle intellect).

In other words, the pseudo-philosophers, who indulge their senses under the impression that they are beyond the reach of their sensusous effects, can never realise this Aatman.

TRUTH ABOUT CASTE

Question : Merciful teacher, even as the women are denied the study of scriptures (or the right to learn *'God Science'* — Brahma Vidyaa), so also is it said that some sections of society have no right to the same study or learning. Is it right, revered sir?

Answer : Noble sister, this is a difficult question; it is not easy to deal with it. This problem has been bothering the catholic minds from time immemorial.

Some authorities posit the division of *'caste'* on physical basis or on hereditary level, whereas some others base it on the qualities of the individual. On careful consideration one can come to the conclusion that the former view is the *'Poorva pakshah'* (the argument that is based on unsubstantiated sophistry and casuistry) and the latter, the *'siddhaantah'* (the well-reasoned and well-established principle of truth, spoken with logical and spiritual authority).

None can definitely say when, why and how this caste division came into being. Since such a distinction is not to be found among the sages (the division of "Brahmarshi" and "Raajarshi" belongs to the level of *'saadhana'* – means —, but not to the *'saadhyam'*— end). So it must be said that the division is based on the nature of the person concerned.

If one were to say that creation itself is made according to such a division it would be misunderstanding the real nature of God, who is equal to all.

If there were to be any fundamental distinctions among mankind they should vary like those among birds and beasts. There are various kinds of birds and beasts, but while the nature of men varies from one to the other there are no variations in the biological manlike nature of mankind. This again proves that the differences among men belong to their nature but not to their *'class'* or *'caste'*.

In the epistemology of *'Nyaaya Saastram'* the definition of anything demands the knowledge of the nature of that thing. So if any one wants to be known as a 'Braahmana' it is only pertinent to find out whether he or she has the qualities of *'Brahma jnaanam'*

(God-knowledge, because the definition is : "Brahma jaanaati iti Braahmanah"— he who knows Brahman or God is a Brahmin).

The bane of modern India is that it is observing the caste system openly or clandestinely, without realising its real significance or original intention. By this I do not mean that cosmopolitan dining and inter-caste marriages, and similar external changes, should be brought about indiscriminately for the eradication of the evil of caste-system. No, I do not mean that, for I always advocate individual freedom. Nothing should be imposed on any member of the free society, whether by the Government or by the religious authorities. And yet, as long as one caste thinks that it is superior to another, the divine equality before God and the social equality before Man would continue to be jeopardised.

Nor is this to say that the higher and the lower differences that exist in the creation, based on the three modes *(gunas)*, should be recklessly ignored. It is as bad to try to bring down to the lower level the men who are by birth endowed with noble qualities, as it is to offer undue advantages to the man of lower nature to equate him with his superior. At the same time, since all are the children of one God, every effort must be made to elevate the nature of the lower-class man to his birthright of realising the equality of all men in the eyes of God.

It is bad to attempt to make the rich poor, but it is always desirable to make the poor rich. And, instead of encouraging those who deserve the earning of the wealth of knowledge, it is wrong to try to make them eternally condemned to ignorance and backwardness.

Just as a worldly parent rejoices in the progress of all of his or her children, the heavenly father wants to see all of his creation to make good. That is why the great men say that the service of man is the service of God. And that is why God asks man to look upon his follow-man as himself.

Aatma-aupamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yah, Arjuna!
Sukham vaa yadi vaa duhkham sah Yogee paramah matah

(He indeed is the highest Yogi who looks upon the pleasure or the grief of the other persons everywhere as his own).

The Lord adds, by his own example :

Samah Aham sarva-bhooteshu na Me dweshyah asti na priyah
Ye bhajanti tu Maam bhaktyaa Mayi te teshu cha api Aham

(I am alike to all creation, I have neither friend nor foe. Whoever approach Me with devotion, I dwell in them, and they dwell in Me).

Lord Krishna continues ;

Maharshayah sapta-poorve chatvaarah Manavah tathaa
Mat-bhaavaah maanasaah jaataah yeshaam loke ime prajaah

(Everyone ranging from the seven great sages, through the four Manus, to the entire population of the world, were born out of My consciousness, which followed their respective approach to Me).

This episode illustrates Sankaracharya's acceptance of human brotherhood in the awareness of the fatherhood of God :

Satyaachaaryasya gamane kadaachit mukti-daayakam
Kaaśee-kshetram prati saha Gauryaa maarge tu Śankaram
Antya-vesha-dharam dṛshṭvaa "gaccha, gaccha" iti cha abraveet
Śankarah sah api chanḍaalah tam punah praaha Śankaram

(Once Sankaraachaarya was going to the liberation-granting place of pilgrimage, Varanasi. On the way he ran into Lord Siva accompanied by Paarvati. The Lord wanted to test the former's practical wisdom and assumed the form of an out-caste. Seeing the man in the garb of a low-born one, the seer asked him to step aside, and not to come near him. Then the 'outcaste' replied as follows).

Anna-mayaat anna-mayam athavaa chaitanyam eva chaitanyaat
Yati-vara! ḍooree-kartum vaanchhasi kim broohi "gaccha, gaccha" iti?

(O great sage, since you and I are equals either from the standpoint of matter — we both share the same elemental origin — or from that of spirit — in the eyes of the supreme Spirit, there is no distinction between one creature and another — whom do you ask to step aside, by saying "go away, go away!" ?),

So saying the Lord disappeared. And the seer composed five *ślokas*, popularly known as "Maneeshaa Panchakam", the purport of which is that as long as a person knows of the identity of the individual and the universal selves, it is immaterial whether he is high-born or low-born, for he (Aadi Śankara) is prepared to accept such a person as his Guru.

We read elsewhere :

Antya-jaatah dwijaatih cha ekah eva sahodarau
Eka-yoni-prasootatvaat eka-śaakhaa iva jaayate

(High-born or low-born, both are one, and both are brothers, for they come from the same root — of God, — and take the shape of the same branch — of mankind).

Verily this universal outlook of the ancient sages speaks for their far-sightedness, because they wrote these undying words for all time, so that in later generations the low-born ones may be able to reply suitably those false prophets who are likely to exploit them or ill-treat them.

We may further interpret *'eka yonih'* through the words of Lord Krishna: *"Mama yonih mahat Brahma | Tasmin garbham dadhaami Aham"* (the creative principle — Brahma — is my source of creation, in which I sow the seeds of birth). This supports the view that God is the 'Mother' as well as the 'Father' of all creation.

Sankaracharya interprets the view of sage Vyaasa in his book "Sarva siddhaanta sangrahah" thus :

Brahma-kshatriya-vit-śoodraan chaatur-varnaan gunaatmakaan
Viprah śuklah nṛpah raktah peetah vaiśyah antyajah asitah

(The four classes of people are determined by the quality of their modal nature: the Braahmana is made of white 'colour'; the Kshatriya, of red; the Vaisya, of yellow; and the Soodra, of black).

If we were to interpret the word, 'varna' as mere colour, we would be grievously erring, for today we see many a Brahmin of dark colour and many a Soodra of fair colour. So we have to equate 'varna' with 'guna' (modal quality). That is, white represents 'Sattwa'; red, 'Rajas'; black, 'Tamas'; the mixture of these colours, yellow, represents the mixture of the three modes in the 'Viasya'

There need be no difference of opinion if 'caste' is determined in this manner.

Moksha-dharme adhikaaritva-siddhaye munih abhyadhaat
Sa-karma-devataa-yoga-jnaana-kaanḍeshu anukramaat

(Sage Vyaasa has devised the four ways of Action, Devotion, Communion and Knowledge for the individual benefit of the different seekers of Salvation).

Pravartayati tat karma-paripaaka-kramam vidan
Rijavah śuddha-varṇaabhaah kshamaavantah dayaalaavah
Swadharma-nirataah ye syuh te dwijeshu dwijaatayah

(Each man can be described and defined by the nature of his action. The men who are upright, noble, patient, merciful and dedicated to doing their apportioned duty, are the more noble among the Brahmins: the epithet, "dwija", or 'twice-born' stands for the initiation into the life of consecrated celibacy, during the 'Upanayanam' or sacred-thread ceremony).

Kaama-bhoga-priyaah teekshṇaah krodhanaah priya-saahasaah
Tyakta-swadharma-raktaangaah te dwijaah kshatrataam gataah

(Among the 'twice-born', those people who are fond of sensual cravings and luxuries ; hard-hearted ; quick-tempered ; courageous; and given to the passionate neglect of their appointed duty, are called Kshatriyas).

Goshu vṛttim samaadhaaya peetaah kṛshi-upajeevinah
Na swakarma karishyanti te dwijaah Vaiśyataam gataah

(Among the 'twice-born' ones, the people who forsake their destined duty, and perform trade, commerce and agricultural work, and who are of a mixed modal nature—yellowish–are known as Vaisyas).

Himsaa-anṛta-priyaah kshudraah sarva-karma-upajeevinah
Kṛshṇaah śaucha-paribhrashṭaah te dwijaah śoodrataam gataah

(Those 'twice-born' people who are fond of violence, untruth, and lowly ways; who indiscriminately live by various jobs; and who are of a darkly ignorant character and have impure habits, are called Soodras).

Thus we see that, among the 'twice-born' or 'Brahmins' themselves, all the four castes can be further classified, depending on the nature of their active life. So it is crystal clear that it is not birth that decides 'caste' but character.

What greater authority do we need than that of Lord Krishna? Let Him speak :

Braahmaṇa Kshatriya Viśaam Śoodraaṇaam cha, Parantapa!
Karmaaṇi pravibhaktaani swabhaava-prabhavaih guṇaih

(The duties of the four castes are determined, according to their respective qualities or natural characteristics).

These duties are detailed in the verses 42, 43 and 44 in the 18th chapter of the Gita, which may be referred to.

Then, again, for the uniformity of God's existence in all creation, let us refer to "Varaaha Upanishat" :

Chaanḍaala-dehe paśu-aadi-sthaavare Brahma-vigrahe
Anyeshu taaratamyena sthiteshu na tathaa asmi Aham

(I — God — am equally seated among all the mutually different entities, ranging from the personal God to the outcaste, from the beasts and the birds to the stones and the grass).

This makes it clear that, as far as God is concerned, there are no earthly divisions, not only between man and man but even between man and nature.

Mahaabhaaratam, in its Vana Parva, reminds us :

Na yonih na api samskaarah na śrutam na cha santatih
Kaaraṇaani dwijatvasya vṛttam eva tu kaaraṇam

(To deserve the title of the 'twice-born' — 'dwija' — the only qualification is the individual's character or quality or occupation, but not his source of birth or the observance of the traditional practices — 'samskaaras' — or his scriptural study or even his heredity).

Satyam daanam kshamaa śeelam aanṛśamsyam tapah ghṛnaa
Driśyante yatra, Naagendra, sah Braahmaṇah iti smṛtah

(In whomsoever would you find truthfulness, charitable disposition, forbearance, strength of character, absence of ill-will, consecration and mercifulness—him may you call a Brahmin).

Śoodre tu bhavet lakshyam dwije tat cha vidyate
Na eva śoodrah bhavet Śoodrah Braahmaṇah na cha Braahmaṇah

(If the just-mentioned qualities are found in a person born of Soodra parents he must be regarded as a Brahmin; conversely, if they are absent in a person born of Brahmin parents, he must be looked upon as a Soodra).

Bhajan bhaktyaa viheenah yah sah chanḍaalah abhidheeyate
Chanḍaalah api bhajan bhaktyaa Braahmaṇebhyah adhikah Mama

(In My view one born of Brahmin parents, but is devoid of devotion to God, is but an outcaste; and a man of outcaste parentage, endowed with devotion to God, is much better than such a Brahmin).

Jnaana-yajna-uḍupena eva Braahmaṇah vaa antyajah api vaa
Samsaara-saagaram teertvaa mukti-paaram hi gacchati

(Whether a Brahmin or an outcaste, only by taking the boat of knowledge can he cross the sea of 'samsaara').

Here again you see that it is not caste but knowledge that is needed for Salvation or for the qualification to seek Salvation.

Jnaanam sarvamantaram bhaati kootastha-aatma-swaroopakam
Prajnaa-maatram idam sookshmam kah api jaanaati puṇyakrit

(The immanent cosmic Self resides in every heart in the form of true knowledge, but only a man who has done active good work as an offering to God can realise this subtle truth of knowledge).

Need it be reiterated that everyone who does good and prays to God is entitled to 'Brahma Vidyaa', but none who has not put in such a noble, conscientious effort (punya karma) ?

Janmanaa jaayate Śoodrah karmaṇaa jaayate Dwijah
Veda-paaṭhaat tu Viprah syaat Brahma-jnaanāt tu Braahmaṇah

(Every one is by birth a 'Soodra'; by virtue of good deeds or through the performance of 'Upanayanam' he becomes the 'twice born' Dwija; through the study of the scriptures he is entitled to be called a 'Vipra'; and only if he realises God—Brahma—does he deserve the appellation. 'Braahmana').

Śoodrah api śeela-sampannah guṇavaan Braahmaṇah bhavet
Braahmaṇah api kriyaa-heenah Śoodraat prati avarah bhavet

(A man of virtuous character and habits, equipped with Sattwa Guna, becomes a Brahmin, even though born of Soodra parents; the person born of Brahmin parents is worse than a Soodra, if he does not actively live up to the code of an ideal Brahmin).

Mat-bhaktam Śoodra-saamaanyaat avamanyanti ye naraah
Narakeshu avatishṭhanti varsha-koṭi naraadhamaah

(Those wretched men that ill-treat My devotees, who merely happen to be Soodras by birth, will be condemned to a life in Hell for a billion years),

Chanḍaalam api Mat-bhaktam na avamanyeta buddhimaan
Avamaanaat patati eva Raurave Narake cha sah

(Even though My devotee happens to be an outcaste, he must not be maltreated by a wise man, for any one ill-treating him would go to the Hell name Raurava in his next birth).

Na Śoodraah Bhagavat-bhaktaah Vipraah Bhaagavataah smṛtāh
Sarva-varṇeshu te Śoodraah ye hi abhaktaah Janaardane

(Although My devotees may be of Soodra extraction, they should still be regarded as Vipras —noble scholars— and Bhaagavatas — noble devotees —, whereas all those people who have no faith in God, no matter in whichever family they are born, have to be treated as Soodras).

Bhaktih ashṭa-vidhaa hi eshaa yasmin Mlecche api vartate
Sah Viprendrah munih śreemaan sah yatih sah cha paṇḍitah
Tasmai deyam tatah graahyam sah cha poojyah yathaa hi Aham

(As long as the eightfold devotion is mastered, albeit such a devotee is a low-born outcaste, he is the best of Brahmins; he is a sage; he is a man of noble qualities; he is a saint; and he is a scholar; and since he is as worship-worthy as I am, he is well-qualified for the highest social status).

So says Lord Vishnu is 'Vaamana Puraaṇam'.

7

Śwapachah api, Maheepaala, Vishṇu-bhaktah Dwija-adhikah
Vishṇu-bhakti-viheenah tu yatih cha śwapacha-adhamah

(Even though the devotee of God happens to be a dog-eating outcaste, he should be regarded as the greatest Brahmin: on the other hand, even an ascetic, if he has no faith in God, must be looked down upon as the worst dog-eater).

Na jaatih kaaraṇam, Taata!, guṇaah kalyāṇa-kaaraṇam
Vṛittistham api chaṇḍaalam tam Devaah Braahmaṇam viduh

(It is not heredity but character that entitles one to bliss or prosperity. As long as the outcaste does his appointed duty as an offering to God, the gods regard him as a Brahmin).

From the following words of the Mundaka Upanishat we find that all men are like different sparks emanating from the same God :

Yathaa sudeeptaat paavakaat visphulingaah sahasraśah
Prabhavante saroopaah tathaa Aksharaat,vividhaah Saumya!,
Bhaavaah prajaayante tatra cha eva apiyanti

(Even as the thousand and one sparks that are spread about by a well-lit fire belong to the same single fire, so also do the myriad manifestations that evolve from the Imperishable One Spirit take individual shapes and finally join Him).

This shows that all men are but different sparks from the same fire of God, and that all are equally entitled to be one with that God.

Na charmaṇah na raktasya maamsasya cha na asthinah
Na jaatih Aatmanah jaatih vyavahaara-kalpitah

(The all-pervading soul has no caste; nor have skin, blood, flesh and bones any differences of caste. Caste, indeed, is manmade and temporal).

And that every caste is fit for liberation, which is implied by the preceding verse from Tejabindu Upanishat, is clearly illustrated by Mahaabhaaratam.

Jaigeeshavyah yathaa Viprah yathaa cha eva Asita-aadayah
Kshatriyaah Janaka-aadyaah tu Tulaadhaaraadayah Viśah
Dharmavyaadha-aadayah sapta Śoodraah Chailavakaadayah
Maitreyee Sulabhaa Śaarjngee Śaanḍilee cha tapasvinee
Ete cha anye cha bahavah neecha-yoni-gataah api
Jnaana-nishṭhaam paraam praaptaah

(The Brahmin, Jaigeeshavya; the Kshatriyas, Asita, Janaka and others; the Vaisyas like Tulaadhaara; Dharmavyaadha, Chailavaka and others belonging to the seven sects of Soodras; and women like Maitreyi, Sulabha, Saarjngi and Saandili — apart from many other low-born people — have attained to the Supreme, gaining true knowledge).

Manu Smriti declares :

Ṛshyaśṛingah mṛgaat jaatah; Kauśikah Gaadhi-nandanah
Jambukah jambuka-utpannah; Gautamah gauta-sambhavah
Vaalmeekah valmeeka-utpannah; Agastyah kumbha-sambhavah
Vyaasah lubdhaka-sambhootah; Vasiṣṭhah tu Urvaśee-sutah
Naaradah rajakee-putrah; Kaunḍinyah munḍakee-sutah
Matangasya matangee syaat; Maanḍavyah manḍukee-sutah
Saankhyah saspara-sambhootah; Gargyeyah gardabhee-sutah
Śunakee-garbha-sambhootah Śaunaka-aadi maharshayah

(The supreme sages were most of them born of people of animal nature or of even inanimate objects, and some of them were of lower caste, as : Rishyasringa from a 'deer': Viswaamitra from a warrior clan; Jambuka from a 'fox'; Gautama from a 'rabbit'; Vaalmeeki from the 'anthill'; Agastya from a 'pot' – or a potter clan; Vyaasa from a hunter family; Vasishtha was mothered by a courtesan; Naarada was the son of a washerwoman; Kaundinya was the offspring of a barber; Matanga was the child of an outcaste; Maandavya was sired by a 'frog'; Saankhya was born of the lowest caste; Gaargyeya was the son of a 'donkey'; and Saunaka was fathered by a 'dog').

Dwijavat Kshatriyasya uktah Praaṇaayaamah, Mahaa-mune!
Viraktaanaam prabuddhaanaam Vaiśyaanaam tathaa eva cha
Soodraaṇaam cha tathaa streeṇaam Praaṇa-samyamanam, Mune!

The practice of Praanaayama – regulation of breath —, representing the divine communion of Yoga, is as much the birthright of the Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, Soodras and the women as of the Brāhmins, provided the former are detached from the worldly allurements and are awake to God-consciousness).

Now please listen to what Lord Shiva told his consort, Paarvati, as reported in the Saanti Parva of *Mahaabhaaratam :*

Jnaana-vijnaana-sampannah samskṛtah Veda-paaragah
Viprah bhavati dharmaatmaa Kshatriyah swena karmaṇaa

(The Kshatriya, by virtue of the performance of the duties that characterise a Brahmin — such as theoretical and practical knowledge, well reformed chararacter and mastery of the scriptures —, himself becomes a Brahmin).

Etaih karma-phalaih, Devi!, nyoona-jaati-kula-udbhavah
Śoodrah api aagama-sampannah dwijah bhavati samskritah

(Similarly, the low born Soodra also, who attains such qualities as a reformed character and scriptural knowledge, becomes a Brahmin).

Braahmaṇah vaa api asat-vṛttah sarva-sankara-bhojanah
Braahmaṇyam tu samutsṛjya Soodrah bhavati taadṛśah

(Even though one is born into a Brahmin family, he would still be considered a Soodra, if he does not duly fulfil the sacred duties of his clan and indulges in evil ways of eating and drinking).

Sat-karmabhih suchih, Devi, śuddhaatmaa vijitendriyah
Śoodrah api dwijavat sevyah iti Brahma-anuśaasanam

(Regardless of the fact of one's birth in a Soodra family, one, who is ever pure in mind and body, by virtue of the performance of good deeds, and who is self-restrained, should always be respected as a Brahmin).

Swabhaavam karma cha śubham yatra Soodre api tishṭhati
Viśishṭah sah Dwijaateh vai vijneyah iti Me matih

(It is my conviction that a Soodra, who is by nature a man of unimpeachable character and a doer of good works, is much better than the average member of the first three castes).

Samsaara-arṇava-magnaanaam jaḍaanaam avivekinaam
Agateenaam gatih saakshaat Jnaanam eva hi kevalam

(Knowledge alone is the refuge of the people who have no refuge and who are lost in the sea of 'samsaara', because of their idiocy and folly).

As you see, noble sister, even fools, dunces and helpless people are entitled to knowledge, for this verse says that it can be the sole refuge of such people — meaning thereby that they, too, can pursue and peruse the scriptural means to knowledge.

Question : Sir, don't you agree with their scriptural authority (quoted from 'Purusha Sooktam')?

Braahmaṇah Asya mukham aaseet
Baahoo Raajanyah kṛtah
Ooroo tat Asya yat Vaiśyah
Padbhyaam Śoodrah ajaayata

From the primordial Cosmic Person's mouth evolved the Brahmin; from His shoulders, the Kshatriya; from his thighs, the Vaisya; and from his feet, the Soodra).

Answer : Since this is the word of God, the Veda, I accept it, But there are several interpretations of the text, with all of which I do not agree.

In this quotation we should attach more importance to the *spirit* behind it than to its *letter*.

The words really mean that the men of knowledge come from the mouth of God, because knowledge is derived from the speech that issues forth from the lips; the men of valour and the rulers of men have their strength in their arms, meaning that they come from God's arms; the men who are seated while pursuing their trade and commerce come from the thighs of God; and those labourers who have to go out for work on their feet or have to do their work standing on their feet are said to come from the feet of God.

All these four classes, as we see, are therefore divided according to their occupation but not according to their heredity.

If we were to interpret literally, then Brahma who was born out of the navel of Vishnu would be a Vaisya, because the navel is included in the term 'ooroo'; Ganga Devi, born of the feet of Vishnu, would be a Soodra woman; and the seven great sages who were born of the heart of God would be Kshatriyas, because the heart is included in the region suggested by the term 'baahoo'.

So, instead of giving the scriptural word an absurd interpretation, we should abide by its symbolic suggestion, and always bear in mind that all men are equal children of one and the same God:

"Mat-bhaavaah maanasaah jaataah
Yeshaam loke imaah prajaah"

(All the people in this world were born of the thoughts that evolved from My mind, following the particular nature of the actions of those men and women who were to be born into this world).

Again, if the men of the four castes alone were said to have been born from the Cosmic Person, what about the women in general and the other castes and classes of people like cobblers and hunters and 'dog-eaters'? And who created the non-Hindus, among whom there are no such divisions? Above all, has God a form or has He no form?

Is this creation in the nature of a pot made by a potter? Has it started at a given point in time and space? What about the non-Aryan races who are not included in this fourfold classification of the Hindus?

It is only because such legitimate questions were ignored and unanswered that the Hindu social ethos had suffered degeneration. If, on the other hand, one were to accept the theory that the Aryans who entered India devised a fourfold classification on a socio-economic basis, for the proper maintenance of society, one would at least be doing some meaningful justice to the authority of the scripture.

Or if one were to judge the classification of mankind on the basis of their colour, then also one should remember that it is the climate of a nation that largely accounts for the differences in the pigment of the inhabitants, and not their predestined creation.

And let us never forget the words of Lord Krishna :

Chaaṭur-varṇyam Mayaa sṛshṭam guṇa-karma-vibhaagaśah

(The fourfold order of society has been established by Me in consonance with the quality and the occupation of the individual).

Question : Would you agree with the view that the Brahmins are so born, as a result of the good deeds they performed in a past birth?

Answer : Well, I have no quarrel with this view but how do you justify it in relation to the Brahmins we see today?

I mean, the effect of virtuous acts is traditionally maintained to cause health, prosperity and wisdom in its doers. But when we do not see such an effect in the people who are said to be the inheritors of virtue, we cannot accept an assertion which is not validated by facts.

And then :

Paapam vinaa śareerasya duhkham na-asti pade pade
Yat kinchit dṛśyate duhkham sarvam paapa-samudbhavam
Sthoolam cha eva atha sookshmam cha duhkham paapa-samudbhavam
Apaapam cha yadaa syaat vai śareeram sukha-bhaajanam

(All the distress we see in our midst is the result of evil deeds, whether the agony is gross or subtle. Only when the individual is fully virtuous can he be fully happy.)

It is the law of nature that a tiger begets a tiger, a mango tree begets a mango tree : accordingly, the men born of virtue, as the Brahmins are said to be, should always beget men of virtue, which obviously is not the case.

If the lower castes are really *"paapa - yonayah"* (people born of sin), they should always beget wicked people, which, again, is not the actual situation.

All this does not mean that three are no divisions among men. The fruit of the same mango tree has four different tastes in the four stages of its growth from the raw state to the ripe one.

So the differences among mankind are judged by the three modes plus one of a mixture of the three modes (*sattva, rajas, tamas*). The four *'varnas'* (which is loosely translated as 'castes') are therefore the four qualities among human character.

Question : I am grateful to you for your classification and I accept your interpretation. However, may I still request you to express your sincere view of 'Varna-Aasrama Dharma' (the order of the caste and of the stage of life ?

Answer : Dear noble sister, I will gladly give you my opinion.

1. Even though a man is born into a low-caste family, I take him to be a mighty sage (Brahmarshi), if he is a great devotee, endowed with internal and external self-restraint and purity, and blessed with the true knowledge of God.

2. I consider the people, belonging to a Brahmin family, but living in evil ways and not abiding by the duties of their 'caste', to be 'chandaalas' (outcastes).

3. I look upon a householder, who is not a slave to his senses, who is merciful and compassionate and who is gifted with divine knowledge, as the supreme Ascetic (Yeteeswara).

4. I think the 'sannyaasee' (hermit) to be the worst kind of a householder (grihastha), if he is still moved by his sensual cravings and is attached to a place and to a narrow-minded creed, devoid of knowledge and replete with superstition.

As you know :

Sannyāsam nirmalam jnaanam, na tu kaashāyamundanam
('Asceticism' means pure knowledge, but not mere wearing of a saffron robe or the shaving of all the hair on the head),

Nivritta-raagasya griham tapo-vanam (even though a man meditates in a forest, his abode is considered to be a mundane

household, if he is still touched by his sensual desires; the home of the ordinary householder can be regarded as a hermitage, if he is detached from the earthly lures).

Besides, it is not the age or the stage of life of the preceptor that counts but his wisdom.

Yukti-yuktam upaadeyam vachanam baalakaat api
Anyat tṛṇam iva tyaajyam api uktam Padma-janmanaa

(A well-reasoned word of wisdom, even if it is spoken by a child, must be accepted; even if it is spoken by the Lord Creator himself, an unwise word must be rejected as mere trash), says sage Vasihtha.

Question : Sir, even now we find greater equanimity and knowledge among Brahmins than in other castes; how do you explain this?

Answer : It may be true. The reason for it is that, since childhood, the Brāhmins are used to eating the 'saattwic' (gentle) vegetarian food and that in several other ways, like bathing regularly or performing some sort of daily prayer, they have habits conducive to good conduct. But in modern society things are gradually changing; if the Brahmins continue to live in the modern ways of non-vegetarianism and loose morals, they will soon be no better than the others, and if the other castes improve their ways of eating and living they will be the equals of true Brahmins.

A little spark of fire can be ignited into a mighty blaze by a clever person, with the necessary means. Similarly, any one — of either sex or of any 'caste' —, if he or she can develop the fire of his or her knowledge through the ignition of the little spark of sincere devotion and Yogic practice, can become a Brahmin or a realised soul.

Even if you have a large fire-making source, but do not have the needed fuel, it will be useless.

In short, right belief and true knowledge make a good man ; the converse, a bad man. Caste has no real basis for goodness or badness as such.

They who seek further information on the subject of caste may refer to Vajra–soochikaa Upanishat.

Om Saantih, Saantih, Saantih

NATURE OF THE MYSTIC

Question : As a popular verse in the book "Seetaa-Raama-Aanjaneyam" suggests, and as many a great mystic declares, of what use are the rigorous methods of penance and self-restraint, when one can find within oneself the eternal truth of the Supreme Spirit?

Answer : Your question indeed is praiseworthy. This view of the book you mentioned, and of the great mystics, is really significant. But it is not so easy to delve into its true mystery.

The rejection of worldly ways and acts and practices is meant for the man who achieves true identity with God, not for the average seeker. It is keeping in mind this point that the ancient preceptors divided the seekers after truth into two sections; the 'abhyaasi' (the novice) and the 'aaroodha' (the master or one who has attained to the Supreme). The difference between these two classes may be likened to that between one who is in active service and one who has retired from service. The latter does not need to attend any office or go to work at a fixed hour; he can afford to spend his time as he pleases. What would happen if an employee or a student or apprentice behaves as he likes or spends his time without regular attention to duty?

The poem from "Seetaa-Raama-Aanjaneyam" has to be understood in relation to the following Gita verse :

Aarurukshoh muneh yogam karma kaaraṇam uchyate
Yoga-aaroodhasya tasya eva śamah kaaraṇam uchyate

(To the man who seeks the communion with God, active work without attachment to its results is needed; but to the man who has mastered that communion, serenity or internal sense-control is the means to final liberation).

To the man who masters his internal senses, the control of his external impulses is a foregone conclusion. The 'Raaja Yoga' or

the mystic communion with God is not within the reach of the average seeker. It fructifies only in the case of a man who has a way of losing himself in utter devotion to God and who renounces all worldly attachments.

Mere recitation or learning of philosophical tenets is useless without faith in God; and mere devotion without absolute detachment is not conducive to salvation.

Lord Raama makes it clear to his devotee, Hanuman, that the people who think that they know all about God, but do not achieve sense-control, only deceive themselves. He adds that unless one completely withdraws into a monistic trance, one's sense-organs are likely to lead him astray again.

As in the Gita, in which Lord Krishna teaches Arjuna, in the book "Seetaa-Raama-Aanjaneyam" (in Telugu) we find the perfect definition of 'Sthita-Prajna' — the man who is established firmly in non-dual God realisation. That is, only he who has his mind and his sense-organs under the perfect control of his soul has the means to self-realisation or self-knowledge or salvation.

In other words, they, who preach transcendental knowledge and the renunciation of activity, without the stress on Yogic practice, to the uninitiated, are like the blind leading the blind : both fall into the pit of Nescience, although they may be in search of knowledge.

BONDAGE OF SENSES

Question : Would the 'Raaja Yogi' (transcendental 'mystic) be bound by 'samsaara,' if he indulges his senses ?

Answer : In the first place you must know that just as he who is married cannot be expected to be a celibate so also is not a Raaja Yogi prone to seek sensual pleasures.

Lord Krishna and other great authorities have again and again pointed out that Yoga is beyond the reach of any one whose senses are not restrained.

You do not expect a king, who is enjoying the luxuries of his palace in the company of his queen, to go out into the streets to beg for his food. Similarly, the Yogi who has accomplished the kingly control over the realm of his body, aided by the ministry of Intellect, and engrossed in the eternally blissful union with the queen of detachment, has no need to beg for the petty sensual joys which come and go in a minute.

Makarandam piban bhrigah gandham na apekshate yathaa
Dhyaana-aasaktam tathaa chittam vishayān na kaankshate

(Even as the bee which is used to drinking honey does not care for the foul smells elsewhere, so too does not the mind centred in meditation seek the momentary sensual delights).

Vishayaan dhyaayatah chittam vishayeshu visajjate
Maam anusmaratah chittam Mayi eva pravileeyate

The mind devoted to the senses is bound by them ; on the other hand, the mind concentrated on Me is merged in My Supreme Spirit, said Lord Krishna to Uddhava.

The Mahaa Upanishat adds :

Manasaa eva manah chhitvaa paaśam parama bandhanam
Bhavaat uttaaraya aatmaanam na asau anyena taaryate

(Cutting off the bonds of mental wanderings by the supra-mental consciousnees, cross the ocean of 'samsaara'. There is no other way to be liberated from that vicious circle of life and death).

Lord Krishna offers this simple advice :

Uddharet aatmanaa aatmaanam na aatmaanam avasaadayet
Ātmā eva aatmanah bandhuh aatmaa eva ripuh aatmanah

(By conscious self-effort one must uplift one's lower self into the supreme higher self, but must never degrade oneself. For one's own self is one's friend as well as foe).

Bandhuh Aatmaa aatmanah tasya yena Aatmaa eva aatmanaa jitah

Anaatmanah tu śatrutve varteta Aatmaa eva śatruvat

(To him who conquers his lower self of the senses, through his understanding of his higher self of the Spirit, the Self is friendly; to him who cannot do so, the Self is inimical).

The Yoga Vaasishtham asserts :
Chittam kaaraṇam arthaanaam tasmin sati jagat-trayam
Tasmin kheeṇe jagat ksheeṇam tat chikitsyam prayatnatah

(The mind is at the root of all consciousness: if it is controlled the external world is immaterial and does not affect one's self-knowledge; if it is not controlled, all the worldly cares continue to bother one. So the mind must be checked with continuous effort).

Vaasanaa dwividhaa proktaa śuddhaa cha malinaa tathaa
Malinaa janma-hetuh syaat śuddhaa janma-vinaaśinee

(The inherited consciousness of man has its influence on all his activities; it is both pure and impure by nature; if one can master the pure consciousness, it leads one to the salvation of rebirthlessness, but if one is goaded by the impure consciousness one is born again and again into the world of desire and distress).

Śubha-aśubhaabhyaam maargaabhyaam vahanti vaasanaa-sarit

Paurusheṇa prayatnena yojaneeyaa śubhe pathi

(The stream of human consciousness flows along both evil and good paths. By conscious self-will and self-effort man must try to channelise it along the noble path).

The Katha Upnaishat makes it further clear :

Yah tu vijnaanavaan bhavati yuktena manasaa sadaa
Tasya indriyaaṇi vaśyaani sat-aśvaah iva saaratheh

(Like the well-trained horses which promptly obey their charioteer, the sense-organs of the man of a peaceful mind and an enlightened intellect are always under his control).

Yah tu avijnaanavaan bhavati ayuktena manasaa sadaa
Tasya indriyaaṇi avaśyaani dushṭa-aśvaah iva saaratheh

(The man of uncontrolled mind and impure intellect would find his sense-organs disobeying him, like the ill-trained horses which cannot be properly driven by the charioteer).

Yah tu vjnaanavaan bhavati samanaskah sadaa śuchih
Sah tu Tat-padam aapnoti yasmaat bhooyah na jaayate

(He who is ever pure in mind and is fully aware of his supreme consciousness would attain to that supreme State from which there is no return to the world of sorrow and strife).

Yah tu avijnaanavaan bhavati amanaskah sadaa aśuchih
Na sah Tat-padam aapnoti Samsaaram cha adhigacchati

(He who is always driven by impure thoughts and is an ignoramus would never attain Salvation but falls again into the pit of 'Samsaara').

Vijnaana-saarathih yah tu manah-pragrahavaan narah
Sah adhvanah paaram aapnoti Tat-Vishṇoh paramam padam

(The man who can make his refined intellct the charioteer, and reins in his mind, crosses the path of Samsaara and spontaneously gains the supreme status of God).

All the foregoing should convince you that a real Raaja Yogi never indulges his senses.

Dear devotee, please learn something more about the need for the control of the senses, from Lord Krishna :

Asamyata-aatmanaa Yogah dușpraapah iti me matih
Vasya-aatmanaa tu yatataa śakyah avāptum upaayatah

(The Yogic communion cannot be achieved by a man whose mind is not in proper control through the performance of selfless action and devotional meditation. It can, however, be gradually mastered through regular performance of the austerities that control the mind.)

Indriyāṇām hi charataam yat-manah anuvidheeyate
Tat asya harati prajnaam vaayuh naavam iva ambhasi

(If a man lets his wandering mind be guided by the instinctive impulses of his senses, they will destroy his intellect — even as the wild wind misguides hither and thither the rudderless boat in the water).

Na asti buddhih ayuktasya na cha ayuktasya bhaavanaa
Na cha abhaavayatah śaantih aśaantasya kutah sukham?

(The man whose mind is not integrated into the supreme consciousness cannot possess intellectual power ; for want of such an intellect, he cannot contemplate the Absolute. Since he cannot concentrate on the Infinite he knows no peace of mind. Indeed, how can such a man of unpeaceable mind ever deserve Bliss ?)

Yatatah hi api, Kaunteya, purushasya vipaśchitah
Indriyaaṇi pramaatheeni haranti prasabham manah

(Even the wise scholar who is seriously attempting Yogic communion finds that his mind is forcibly diverted by the natural wavering attractions of the impetuous sense organs).

Then is it not all the more reason why an ordinary Yogic practitioner must be very careful in his quest ? And is it not imperative that the so-called Raaja Yogis should always be on the lookout against the straying of their senses, rather than maintain that they can do as they please with their body as long as their soul is emancipated? If only for the sake of setting a good example to the novices, the realised souls should practise perfect self-restraint in every way.

The Lord continues :

Taani sarvaaṇi samyamya yuktah aaseeta Mat-parah
Vaśe hi yasya indriyaaṇi tasya parjnaa pratishṭhitaa

(Therefore one must completely subdue the sensual cravings and be firmly seated in the contemplation of God. Verily, the intellect of that person is well-established in God-consciousness, whose senses are under his full control).

Yadaa samharate cha ayam koormah angaani iva sarvaśah
Indriyaaṇi indriya-arthebhyah tasya prajnaa pratihitaa

(He who directs inwards the outgoing impulses of his senses in the manner of the tortoise that withdraws its limbs into its shell, would find his intellect well-concentrated on God).

Tatah tatah niyamya etat aatmani eva vaśam nayet
Yatah yatah niścharati manah chanchalam asthiram

(On whatsoever impulse of the sense-organs does the mind find its attention wandering, that particular sensual impluse must be subdued with the concentration firmly directed towards the contemplation of the Self; that is, the senses must be brought under the control of the Self).

The *Vedaanta Dindima* of Sankaracharya says :

Sukham alpam bahuh kleśah vishaya-graahiṇaam nṛṇaam
Anantam Brahma-nishṭhaanaam iti Vedaanta-ḍinḍimah

(For the people who crave sensual pleasures, the effort involves great pains and yields only very little joy. On the other hand, the joy of the people who are consecrated to God-consciousness is immense).

Purushaartha-traya-aavishṭaah purushaah paśavah dhruvam
Moksha-arthee purushah śreshṭhah iti vedaanta-ḍinḍimah

(The men who are preoccupied with the worldly duty, financial gain and physical desire may be said to be the equals of beasts.

Only he who strives for the self-knowledge leading to Salvation is a worthy man).

Manu Smriti warns us :

Indriyaaṇaam tu sarveshaam yadi ekam ksharati indriyam
Tena asya ksharati prajnaa driteh paatraat iva udakam

(Even if one sense-organ craves its delights, the intellect of that man is destroyed, just as a small hole in the pot causes the loss of the whole water in it).

And so, howsoever great a Raaja Yogi may be in his own estimation, he cannot with impunity indulge in sensual pleasures.

—

DISSATISFACTION FROM SENSUAL PLEASURES

Question : Some philosophers maintain that the mind which is diverted towards the enjoyment of a particular sensual impulse must not be checked; their reasoning is that the mind, once the impulse is satisfied, of its own accord checks its wandering; that if the mind is stopped from its impulse it would all the more crave that pleasure; and that the mental craving is, like the hunger that is quenched after the food is eaten, is gone when it finds fulfilment. Is this true, Sir ?

Answer : Indeed, it is such philosophers that inspired the coining of the term 'Sushka Vedaantin' (false philosopher).

No, sir, their reasoning is wrong, for the simple reason that hunger arises afresh after the food eaten is digested. So also the sensual craving, a little while after it is sated, once again craves fulfilment.

Sage Suka says :

Na jaatu kaamah kaamaanaam upabhogena śaamyati
Havishaa krishnavartmaa iva bhooyah eva abhivardhate

(Never does lust lose its craving by its fulfilment; in fact, like the oblation poured into the fire, it is further increased by that fact).

Lord Krishna adds :

Kaamah eshah krodhah eshah rajo-guṇa-samudbhavah
Mahaaśanah mahaa-paapmaa viddhi enam iha vairiṇam

(This is passion, this is anger:— born of the mode of passion. Know this to be the all-devouring, all sinful mighty foe of man).

Dhoomena aavriyate vahnih yathaa aadarśah malena cha
Yathaa ulbena aavritah garbhah tathaa tena idam aavritam

(As the fire is enveloped by smoke, the mirror is covered by dirt, and the embryo is encompassed by the womb, so also is man's wisdom covered by passion).

Tasmaat tvam indriyaaṇi aadau niyamya, Bharatarshabha!
Paapmaanam prajahi hi enam jnaana-vijnaana-naaśanam

(So, Arjuna, you must first of all control your senses — the desire for the fulfilment of which is the most sinful thing and the destroyer of both theoretical and practical knowledge).

Baahya-sparśeshu asakta-aatmaa vindati aatmani yat sukham
Sah Brahma-yoga-yukta-aatmaa sukham akshayam aśnute

The man, whose mind is in godly communion, who derives his joy from within, and who is detached from the delights of external touch, indeed enjoys supreme bliss).

Ye hi samsparśajaah bhogaah duhkha-yonayah eva te
Aadi-antavantah, Kaunteya, na teshu ramate budhah

(The pleasures that are derived from sensuous touch are momentary and are the root of all sorrow. No wise man takes delight in these sensuous joys which come and go).

We read elsewhere :

Agni-dagdham yathaa beejam śaakhaa-pallava-varjitam
Jnaana-dagdham tathaa Yogee punarjanma na vidyate

(Just as the seed that is burnt by fire does not grow into a tree full of leaves and branches, so also is not the man, whose worldly actions are burnt by his knowledge, ever re-born).

TRUTH ABOUT INACTION

Question : Some wise men say that by doing good deeds a man goes to heaven, and when he is reborn on earth he becomes a rich man; that by doing evil deeds a man goes to hell, and when he is reborn on earth he becomes a poor man; and that, therefore, the seeker after liberation must not indulge in any work (other than that needed for the bare sustenance of the body). Is this really so, revered sir ?

Answer : Dear devotee, this comment on Action is indeed very mysterious. That is why Lord Krishna took great care to explain its intricacies.

The scriptures say "Karma karmanaa nasyate" (Action is destroyed by doing action). This is like removing a thorn in the flesh by means of a thorn-like thing, or combating a poison by a poisonous antidote. The subtle distinction is that the man whose birth is the result of Action is released from its bondage by doing the Action which is selfless and offered to God.

Sankaracharya explains in his book 'Viveka Choodaamanih':

Jantoonaam nara-janma durlabham atah punstvam tatah vipratаa
Tasmaat Vaidika- dharma-maarga-parataa vidwattvam asmaat param
Aatma-anaatma-vivechanam su-anubhavah Brahma-aatmanaa samsthitih
Muktih no śata-janma koti-sukṛtaih puṇyaih vinaa labhyate

(Among all the living creatures it is a rare privilege to get the human birth; rarer still is it to be born a man; rarest is it to be a Brahmin. But among the Brahmins only he who follows the rules and regulations governing Brahminhood is worthy of that birth; worthier still is the one who has the wisdom to distinguish between the true Self and the false Non-self; best of all is it to experience the identity with the Universal Self. But all this could not be, in the first place, obtained without the good effect of virtuous deeds done in the past births, which pave the way for the Salvation that results from the acquisition of the Grace of God obtained thereby).

The foregoing once again demonstrates the need for the performance of good deeds till the attainment of complete identity with God. Even afterwards the realised soul is advised to work for the benefit of his follow-men, even as the incarnations of God engage themselves in worldly activity, albeit they have nothing to gain for themselves by way of Action (see Gita, III-22).

The scripture says :

Sat-karma-paripaakatah bahoonaam janmanām ante
nṛṇaam Moksha-icchaa jaayate

(By virtue of the good deeds performed during the course of many former births, the desire for Liberation comes to man).

Let us go back to the Gita :

Niyatasya tu sannyāasah karmaṇah na upapadyate
Mohaat tasya parityaagah taamasah parikeertitah

(The renunciation of one's appointed duties would not do. The person who leaves his activities before obtaining self-knowledge does so out of the self-delusion born of the Taamasa mode).

Duhkham iti eva yat karma kaayakleśa-bhayaat tyajet
Sah kritvaa Raajasam tyaagam na eva tyaaga-phalam labhet

(He who leaves the performance of virtuous deeds, out of the fear of physical discomfort, does so because of his passion-filled nature. Such renunciation, born of selfish comfort, does not get the benefit of true renunciation).

Na karmaṇaam anaarambhaat naishkarmyam purushah aśnute
Na cha sannyasanaat eva siddhim samadhigacchati

(Not by mere abstention from activity does one beget the fruit of the state of being unaffected by action. Nor does he find salvation in merely renouncing works).

The renunciation is not of work but of the results of works. Today we see many false prophets and pseudo-*sannyaasins*

deceiving themselves and their followers in their ignorance of this dictum of Lord Krishna.

Niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyaayah hi akarmaṇah
Śareera-yaatraa api cha te na prasiddhyet akarmaṇah

(Do your apportioned duty without fail, for it is better — for a novice — to be engaged in action than in inaction; besides, even your self-sustenance will not be possible by taking to the way of Inaction).

Today we see the misguided Sannyaasins leaving their families, not because of their wish for the life of renunciation but because of their inability to cope with the responsibilities of the householder. Such people naturally derive neither the benefit of worldly life nor do they deserve otherworldly beatitude.

Sannyaasah tu, Mahaabaaho!, duhkham aaptum ayogatah
Yoga-yuktah munih Brahma na chireṇa adhigacchati

(To the man who has not mastered the way of Action through constant Yogic practice, *Sannyaasa* or the way of renunciation is hard to be obtained. But one who has performed his sacred duty with due consecration, and imbued with Yogic communion, would before long attain to the status of Brahman).

Kaayena manasaa buddhyaa kevalaih indriyaih api
Yoginah karma kurvanti sangam tyaktvā Aatma-śuddhaye

(Even the well-estabished Yogis still perform good works physically or mentally or merely through the senses, all the while detached from the fruits of those works, and only with the intention of purifying their intellectual Self).

When even the healthy person needs to observe the rules of proper diet, need it be emphasised that the sick person has to follow a strict regimen ?

Yuktah karma-phalam tyaktvaa śaantim aapnoti naishṭhikeem
Ayuktah kaama-kaareṇa phale saktah nibadhyate

(The person who is in communion with God, leaving alone the fruits of his works, would accomplish the well-founded peace of mind; but he who is ununited with the divine consciousness, and performs his works with an ulterior motive, is enslaved by the selfsame works).

Sage Vasishtha opines :

Avidyaam sreshṭhayaa śreshṭhah kshaalayan eva tishṭhati
Malam malena apaharan yuktijnah rajakah yathaa

(Just as a skilful washerman washes the dirty clothes with the help of a dirtlike detergent, the wise man finds fulfilment by destroying the fruits of the enslaving action of Nescience, through the performance of a selfless and self-liberating action of Yoga).

Therefore, dear friend, please do not heed the words of the charlatans. Do not leave the performance of your daily duty till you attain complete detachment from their results. Even then you have to continue to act for the benefit of your fellow-men — of course, without any ulterior motive.

In fact, the sacred books really mean by 'renunciation' the renouncing of evil deeds but not the good works. It is only the pseudo-philosophers that leave action behind — the good action that is the straight road to salvation.

SECRET OF DOs & DON'Ts

Question : Revered father, kindly enlighten me on the significance of the dictum that the perfect mystic – achala paripoorna Raaja Yogi — need not be bothered about the prescribed duties or the proscribed actions (Vidhi—nishedhaalu).

Answer : Wise friend, it is true that the demand for action and the liberty from action, one way or the other, do not affect the movements of a truly realised soul who has attained the perfect transcendent knowledge. And yet, as I have been again and again pointing out, even he has to indulge in action for the edification of the laity.

Without keeping in mind the injunction of Lord Krishna to this effect, the false prophets are propagating licentiousness, by saying that they and those people who are like them can do whatever they like or eat whatever they fancy.

Let me tell you a story in this connection.

There was a great Yogi. Without attaining the sort of Yogic powers he had, his pupils began aping him. To teach them a lesson, the Yogi started on a journey, taking along with him four of his disciples. They were passing through a land where even drinking water was unavailable. They happened to meet a toddy-seller on the way. The teacher and the pupils, badly in need of water to quench their thrist, sought his charity. The Guru did not flinch from drinking the liquor which alone the sapper could offer (for he had no water in his pot) them. Since the Guru drank the liquor (kallu), the pupils thought that they too could do so with impunity and did so. After a while, in another waterless place the Guru had to be satisfied with drinking the melted brass which the smiths there could offer him, for want of water. The Guru, by virtue of his Yogic powers, could gladly imbibe the hot metallic liquid, and asked his disciples to follow his example if they wanted to quench their thirst. They were naturally frightened at the sight of the melted hot brass. When they resisted his command, the Guru placed a curse on them, because they

were unfit for salvation — by the fact that they formerly attempted supernatural actions without attaining supernatural powers beforehand.

It is relevant to analyse the famous Gita verse in this context :

Yat-yat aacharati śreshṭhah tat-tat eva itarah janah
Sah yat pramaaṇam karoti lokah tat anuvartate

(Whatsoever the noble person does is accepted as a good example by the others. Whatever example he sets, the rest of the world treats it as the one that is worth following).

That is why the noble man must always take good care to see that each individual action of his is capable of being an object-lesson to the rest of humanity.

It is also popularly said, "Yathaa raajaa tathaa prajaah" (the people follow in the footsteps of the ruler). Accordingly, we see even at the village level, the people who have a worthy village officer behaving well, and badly, if otherwise. We may say, likewise, that "Yathaa guruh tathaa sishyah" holds equally good, and therefore the teacher must ever be vigilant in setting a good example to his pupils.

As already noted, the incarnations of God also take part in good works, in order to be a shining example to humanity.

Lord Krishna continues :

Yadi hi Aham na varteyam jaatu karmaṇi atandritah
Mama vartmaa anuvartante manushyaah, Paartha, sarvaśah
Utseedeyuh ime lokaah na kuryaam karma chet Aham

(If I do not always remain on the alert and sometimes do not engage in useful action, the world at large, which follows me, would take to the idle ways of life).

As we see, it is more common for the people-at-large to take to a bad example than to a good one—which is all the more reason why the preceptors should take greater care than the students in living up to the noble ideals and practices of our hoary tradition.

Saktaah karmaṇi avidvaamsah yathaa kurvanti, Bhaarata!
Kuryaat vidvaan tathaa asaktah chikeershuh loka-sangraham

(If the ignoramus does his work, bound by its shackles and its results, the man of wisdom should do his works without any attachment and with a view to doing good to the world).

Without realising the import of the words of the Lord, the modern Sannyaasins are trying to tell the innocent worshipper that there is no need to do works or to pray to idols or to go on a pilgrimage or to visit a temple — without at the same time finding out whether the worshipper is a novice or a man of knowledge.

It is only with such charlatans in view that the Lord warned thus :

Na buddhi-bhedam janayet ajnaanaam karma-sanginaam
Joshayet sarva-karmaaṇi vidvaan yuktah samaacharan

(The wise man must not lead astray the laymen who are devoted to works and to the unintelligent forms of worship like idolatry. On the other hand, he too should gladly join them in doing similar works with equal enthusiasm).

Although God is all-pervasive and must be realised in one's own soul, the layman is not capable of reaching such transcendent heights of self-knowledge. If one were to tell him that there is no personal God or that the idols are just stones he would lose even the little faith he has in God. So for the benefit of the lesser intellects, the wise man should encourage such outward forms of worship also, by taking active interest in them himself.

The Creator, Brahma, saw the need to impart a gradual type of worship to the world at large, and so he instructed his son sage Vasishtha, as follows :

Tatrakriyaa-kaanḍa-paraah tvayaa, putra!, mahaa dhiyaa
Upadeśyaah kriyaa-kaanḍam krameṇa krama-śaalinaa

(There, in the land of the devoted people, you must instruct the path of action, with great sagacity and with a view to enabling

the men engaged in good actions to progress gradually towards the path of knowledge from there, through the path of devotion).

Virakta-chittaah cha tathaa mahaa-prajnaah viraagiṇah
Upadeśyaah tvayaa, Saadho!, jnaanena aananda-daayinaa

(And to those who are completely detached from the worldly life, you should impart the knowledge of the identity of the individual and the universal selves — a knowledge which alone provides infinite bliss).

The physician going the rounds would prescribe the different drugs that suit the different patients. Instead, if he were to give the same medicine to all the various patients, he would not be treating their disease but mistreating them. Nor can he tell them the philosphy that the 'body is not the soul', and that there is, therefore, no need for their bodies to receive medical attention. Such is the behaviour of the false prophets who decry material worship indiscriminately, and who advise transcendent contemplation to each and every one.

Sage Vasishtha cautions us :

Ajnasya artha-buddhasya sarvam Brahma iti yah vadet
Mahaa-naraka-jaaleshu sah tena viniyojitah

(He who preaches to the ignoramus the identity of the individual self with the universal Self, by pointing out that all this is Brahman, would only be leading him to hell).

Is it not a crime to mislead the innocent persons thus?

Aadau śama dama praayaih guṇaih śishyam viśodhayet
Paśchaat sarva-gatam Brahma śuddhah tvam iti bodhayet

(First the diciple's mind must be cleansed with the advice concerning mental and physical self-restraint. Only when his mind is thus purified and ready to receive the trascendental instruction should he be told that he is fundamentally the pure Self and is one with the all-pervading Brahman).

Prabuddha-buddheh praksheeṇa-bhoga-icchasya niraaśishah
Na asti avidyaa-malam iti tvaadriśasya eva gocharah

(Raama, only to someone as pure as you, who is free from the dirt of Nescience, whose intellect is alive to God-consciousness, and who has no wish to enjoy the transitory joys of this world or the other world would the transcendental knowledge of the self be intelligible).

To get back to the Gita :

Buddhyaa viśuddhayaa yuktah dhṛtyā aatmaanam niyamya cha
S'abda-aadeen vishayaan tyaktvaa raaga-dweshau vyudasya cha

(The seeker should equip himself with pure intellect, and control his wandering consciousness with determined effort. Then leaving alone the influence of passion and prejudice, he should concentrate all the functions of the cognitive senses on one single thought of the Infinite).

The *Padma Purāṇam* says :

S'aantah cha nirmalah cha api parigraha-vivarjitah
Kalpate Brahma-bhooyaaya Brahma-dhyaanasya vaibhavaat

(On account of the godly meditation the non-reward-seeking man of peace and purified mind performs, he readily attains to the state of the Absolute).

Aatma Bodha says ;

Vivikta-deśa-aaseenah virāgah vijitendriyah
Bhaavayet Ekam Aatmaanam Tam Ananta-dheeh

(Sitting in complete solitude, detached from all earthly ties, and controlling all the senses, the meditator must concentrate on the One Infinite Universal Self).

Coming back to the Gita :

Praśaanta-aatmaa vigata-bheeh Brahmachāri-vrate sthitah
Manah samyamya Mat-chittah yuktah aaseeta Maṭ-parah

(Quiet, fearless, and celibate, the seeker must subdue his wandering mind and concentrate it on Me, the Universal Spirit, with single-minded devotion to Me), says the Lord.

Yunjan evam sadaa aatmaanam yogee niyata-maanasah
S'aantim nirvaaṇa-paramaam Mat-samsthaam adhigacchati

(Thus ever binding his controlled mind to the supreme omniscience, the meditator attains the self-liberating peace that passes understanding and becomes one with my transcendental spirit).

This is the way of meditation, as prescribed by the various authoritative texts. If the advice is unheeded...

Yah śaastra-vidhim utsrijya vartate kaama-kaaratah
Na sah siddhim avaapnoti na sukham na paraam gatim;

(He who behaves as he pleases, without living up to the ideals handed down by the sacred books, would not obtain either peace of mind on earth or the bliss of God-realisation).

Viveka Choodaamani stresses :

Na gacchati vinaa paanam vyaadhih aushadha-śabdatah
Vinaa aparoksha anubhavam Brahma-śabdaih na muchyate

(Just as the malady is not remedied by the mere utterance of the prescribed drug, but by taking the medicine, so also does not Salvation come to the man who merely utters the word 'Brahma', without actually experiencing the transcendental unity of his own self with that Supreme Self).

Śareera-poshaṇa-arthee san yah Aatmaanam didṛkshati
Graaham daaru-dhiyaa dhṛtvaa nadeem tartum sah gacchati

(He who wants to realise the Supreme Self, through the mere care of his physical self, is like the man who crosses the river riding over a crocodile under the impression that it is a piece of floating wood).

Mohah eva mahaa-mrityuh mumukshoh vapuh aadishu
Mohah vinirjitah yena sah mukti-padam arhati

(The self-delusion that makes the seeker identify his interests with his bodily functions is the real mighty death. He who is freed from such self-deceit deserves spontancous Salvation).

Actually, salvation is our original state. The bondage comes with the superimposition of the bodily functions and mental feelings upon the Supreme Self which is one's real identity. When this superimpostion is stopped through the knowledge of the real self, Salvation follows automatically. That is, what one should do is really not to seek salvation but to destroy the self-identification with the body and the consequent self-delusion.

Fear of death is the real death. Immortality means to be free from this constant fear, which comes of the bodily self-delusion. Fearlessness is Immortality as well as Brahman (Abhayam vai Brahma).

Moham jahi mahaa-mṛtyum deha-daara-suta-aadishu
Yam jittvaa munayah yaanti Tat Vishṇoh paramam padam

(Therefore conquer the delusion that makes you identify your interests with your attachment to your body, wife, son and the like—for it is overcoming such self-delusion that the sages of yore have attained to the Supreme).

VOW OF CELIBACY

Brahmacharyam (celibacy) is of eight kinds.

Since this is at the root of the fulfilment of man's four chief aims in life — Duty, Money, Desire and Salvation —, sage Patanjali, in his Yoga Sootra, attached the highest importance to it ;

"Brahmacharya-pratishthaaayaam veerya-laabhah"

(To one who is well-established in bachelorhood comes the physical as well as the spiritual brilliance of potency).

The real potency is of the spirit, not the physical power that enables one to enjoy sexual life.

Of course, physical potency is also strengthened by observing celibacy, as we see in the conquest of the godly incarnation, Parasuraama, by Bheeshma (who was a true celibate). And it is by the power of celibacy that Hanuman could cross the sea, and subdue the enemy in Lanka.

Even among the beasts, the lion which seeks sexual contact only once in three years — and the lioness which conceives only once in life — have the power, despite their small size, to conquer mighty creatures like the elephant.

So all the people who seek the bliss of this world as well as that of the other world observe celibacy.

The householder is permitted sexual union with his spouse only during the period she is able to conceive — that is, married sex should be motivated by procreation alone. The people of the other three orders — the student, the retired man and the ascetic — should religiously maintain their bachelorhood.

If the married couple also meet only during the auspicious periods, by consulting the lunar calendar, they will beget good and healthy children.

The sacred law-books suggest that the wife must be looked upon as a sister, a fortnight after she menstruates, and like a mother three years after she is delivered of a child. And, of

course, when either parent suffers from any kind of disease the couple must observe perfect celibacy; else, the offspring will be diseased in both mind and body.

The three main kinds of celibacy are : not to think of the sex act; not to converse with the opposite sex with that intention; and not to touch the opposite sex with the similar intent. The difference between those who can observe celibacy and those who cannot is that between an elephant and a goat.

The genius of great sages like Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, et al. is due to their celibacy. Although Ramanuja was married, he embraced Sannyaasa (the life of the ascetic) soon afterwards.

Manu Smriti records the voice of God thus :

Aayuh tejah balam veeryam prajnaa śreeh cha mahat yaśah
Puṇyam cha Mat-priyatvam cha labhyate brahmacharyayaa

(Longevity, brilliance, might, strength, intellectual power, wealth, great renown, virtue and devotion to Me — all these are the good results of a life of celibacy).

Chitta-aayattam nriṇaam śukra-aayattam cha jeevitam
Tasmaat śukram manah cha eva rakshaṇeeyam prayatnatah

(Man's semen is the source of his mental activity; so is life dependent on his semen: therefore man must always take good care of his semen and his mind), says Hatha Yoga Pradeepikaa.

ACTION & MEN OF KNOWLEDGE

Question : Revered sir, although all that you say sounds well-reasoned, why is that we are not able to do away with the duality that still persists in our thoughts ?And then, if non-dualism is what you advocate, what about the absolute freedom allowed to the man who is endowed with the mastery of monism, by this verse in "Suka Panchakam" ?

Nistraiguṇye pathi vicharataam
Kah vidhih kah nishedhah?

(To one who moves in the supreme realm of the Absolute, which is beyond the three modes of manifest nature, what matter the licences or the taboos of the mundane world ?).

Similarly, the Isa Upanishat declares :

Yasmin sarvaaṇi bhootaaṇi Aatmaa eva abhoot vijaanatah
Tatra kah mohah kah śokah ekatvam anupaśyatah ?

(To the realised soul, who looks upon the whole creation as the manifestation of the Supreme Self, where is joy and where is distress in his unitary concept ?).

Does not a man of wisdom behave like a sovereign of all the world ? Kindly clear my doubt, sir !

Answer : Dear friend, this is an intricate problem.

The idea is that where everything is permeated by the Self, and where the individual self comes to realise this truth and is non-dually united with that Supreme Self, there is nothing or nobody apart from oneself.

However, this does not mean that the man of knowledge can eat and do whatever he likes but that he sees the universal Soul manifested in the entire universe.

You have justly compared a man of knowledge to a powerful emperor. But don't you know that a great ruler does not do as he likes ? He rules his people according to the rules of justice, but does not take advantage of his power to oppress and torture them. Besides, he has to heed the advice of his minister and his court pundit. He consults the sacred codes like Manu Smriti.

Likewise, the man of wisdom lives according to the rules of philosophy and moral law, but does not act with licentiousness.

During the time of Sankaracharya the Advaita philosphy reigned supreme, because great sages like him divided the human ethos between the material and the spiritual, and saw to it that each order of life (Aasrama) was adhered to with strict discipline. It is only because Advaita has fallen into the hands of the unscrupulous false philosphers of later ages that it has come to mean what it does not say: that the world is unreal (the unreality is from the point of view of the transcendent, eternal, changeless, ultimate Reality; Advaita accepts the 'vyaayahaarika' or temporal, changing reality of the world, which, however, is *like an illusion* — but not illusion as such — to the man of wisdom and is too real to the ignoramus).

Since Advaita cannot be fully realised by the modern sages in general, let alone the ordinary seeker, it is better that the average devotee follow the path of Dwaita or Visishtaadwaita, which, though they do not teach the ultimate reality, are useful as far as practicable religion is concerned:

Anubhootim vinaa moodhah vrthaa Brahmani modate
Pratibimbita-saakhhaa-agra-phala-aasvaadana-modavat

(The unwise man who rejoices in his supposed realisation of God may be likened to the man who enjoys eating the fruit hanging down from the branch of the tree reflected in water).

In the olden days the sages reached the stage of true self-realisation through constant and severe Yogic practice and genuine penance. Nowadays the so-called "Raaja Yogis" are claiming hereditary rights in presiding over the holy institutions, without bothering adout the tutelage that they should undergo before they earn that right. And they cover their laziness to do penance and the good deeds, in the name of monistic or transcendent philosophy.

NATURE OF MODERN MYSTICS

Question : But, sir, all the Raaja Yogis of today claim that they speak from their personal experience. What is meant by this *'Swa-anubhavom'*, sir ?

Answer : No man should trust his own experience. How can one judge for oneself the reality of the world without the authority or the guidance of the tried and trusted scriptures ? For instance, a jaundiced eye finds the world all yellow. To the passenger in the moving train, the tree and the other inanimate things along the track appear to be moving. To the man who is ill, a sweet thing may taste bitter.

So 'self-experience' is not enough for making the right kind of judgement. One has to take into account the authority of the scriptures also.

Guru-saastra-ukta-maargena swa-anubhootyaa cha Chit-ghane
Brahmaa eva aham iti jnaatvaa veeta-sokah bhavet munih

(The sage should be liberated from the sorrowful 'samsaara', with the convitcion that 'my real self is one with the Eternal Brahman' — a conviction resulting from the authority of the scriptures, the instruction of the preceptor and the experince gained by oneself).

And see what the Gita has to say about the qualities of the man of knowledge or mystic :

Amaanitvam adambhitvam ahimsaa kshaantih aarjavam
Aachaarya-upaasanam saucham sthairyam aatma-vinigrahah

(Humility, modesty, non-violence, forbearance, integrity, obedience to the teacher, purity, uprightness and self-restraint).

Indriya-artheshu vairaagyam anahankaarah eva cha
Janma-mrityu-jaraa-vyaadhi-duhkha-dosha-anudarsanam

(Detachment from sensual leanings and unselfishness; and the ability to see the impermanence and evil nature of birth, death, old age, disease and distress).

Asaktih anabhishvangah putra-daara-griha-aadishu
Nityam cha sama-chittatvam ishta-anishta-upapattishu

(Non-attachment and absense of being addicted to the pleasures derived from progeny, spouse and own home ; and always being of equable temperament, unaffected by likes and dislikes).

Mayi cha ananya-yogena bhaktih avyabhichaarinee
Vivikta-deśa-sevitvam aratih jana-samsadi

(Single-minded devotion to Me, coupled with the non-dual communion with the supreme spirit; and the love of staying in solitary places, far from the madding crowd).

Adhyaatma-jnaana-nityatvam tattva-jnaana-artha-darśanam
Etat jnaanam iti proktam ajnaanam yat atah anyathaa

(Constant search for spiritual truth and the insight into the inner meaning of the study of the Self — these noble qualities alone signify true knowledge : the opposite qualities bespeak ignorance).

The Lord has also again and again emphasised the need for active divine qualities—not just their verbal knowledge, but their application in daily living :

(The divine qualities in man make for Liberation, and the demoniac ones, for bondage).

And the scripture insists that even the ascetics have to obey these rules, as though they were the laws of the land :

Bhikshaatanam, japah, dhyaanam, snaanam, śaucham, Śiva-archanam
Kartvyaani shat etaani yateenaam nripa-dandavat

(Eating the food earned by seeking alms but not by providing for oneself through property-owning ; recitation of the name of God or of the sacred symbol 'AUM' ; meditation; ablution; mental and physical purity; and God-worship—these six things must be observed even by the hermits, as if they were the orders of the king of the country, which cannot be disobeyed).

That the worldly things are not to be enjoyed but rejected is the guidance the scriptures give to the hermit :

Tyaktvaa lokaan cha Vedaah cha visayaan indriyaani cha
Aatmani eva sthitah yah tu praapnoti paramam padam

(He, who remains firmly concentrated on inward self-awareness, bereft of the worldly preoccupation, the reward-seeking scriptural rites, and the active as well as cognitive functions of the sense organs, would receive the supreme bliss).

The way of life of the hermit cannot be one-sided detachment but full-fledged, comprehensively-regulated, selfless, conscious living :

Jeevitam yasya dharma-artham, dharmah jnaana-artham eva cha
Jnaanam cha dhyaana-yoga-artham sah achiraat muchyate narah

(The seeker, whose way of life is governed by the dictates of Dharma; whose sense of duty is dictated by true knowledge; and whose knowledge is meant for constant meditational communion with God — would instantaneously be liberated from the clutches of 'samsaara').

Finally let the modern "Raaja Yogi" note this warning :

Patati asau dhruvam bhikshuh yasya bhikshoh dwayambhavet
Dhee-poorvam reta-utsargah dravya-sangraham eva cha

(The ascetic who wilfully indulges in these two activities will be ruined for ever——intercourse with the opposite sex and the attempt to earn money).

MENTAL DISCONTENT FROM SENSUAL JOY

Question : Sir, although you have broadly answered this query already, I should like to be specifically enlightened about the wisdom or otherwise of the contention of the modern 'Raaja Yogi' who allows that, whatever thing the mind seeks to enjoy, it should be allowed to do so, because such enjoyment would once for all rid it of that desire. Is it a correct view, esteemed sir ?

Answer : Dear friend, such enjoyment would only increase the craving of the mind — like the ghee poured into fire increasing the flames, instead of putting it out.

The only way to check the mental impulses is not to give them free play but to burn them with the fire of wisdom :

The Lord warns :

Indriyasya indriyasya-arthe raaga-dweshau vyavasthitau
Tayoh na vaśam aagacchet tau hi asya paripanthinau

(Amid the various functions of the various sense-organs innately dwell the twin-foes of passion and prejudice. The man of wisdom should spiritually conquer these ingrained physical enemies of his, and should never let them take control of him).

TRUTH ABOUT CONSTANT DETACHMENT

Question : Is it not because of the accumulation of the effects of former births that the mind pursues its cravings? Who can avoid this initiated predestination (Praarabdha) which can be destroyed only through its being experienced, as the scripture itself says — "Praarabdham bhogatah nasyet" (the predetermined fate of a man can be extinguished only by living it down) ? This being so, revered sir, how are we to understand what you maintain to the contrary?

Answer : Dear devotee, isn't it because the average seeker of salvation is unable to unravel the mystery of this 'predestined fate' (praarabdha karma) that he is failing in his search?

The inevitability of predestination is said of the dumb creatures who act in accordance with their instinct and cannot exercise their discriminating intellect. The 'praarabdha' of man is the result of his own former actions, no doubt, but he has the choice to ward off its evil effect by exercising his free will in the present existence.

The excuse of 'praarabdha' does not permit man to kill his fellow creatures, like a tiger, and to drink liquor and take intoxicant drugs, like the demons. If 'praarabdha' is solely responsible for all human actions, you cannot punish the thief, the murderer and the adulterer.

Please don't think that these self-styled 'Raaja Yogi's can get away with their evil deeds. God cannot be mocked, and none can escape reaping what he or she sows.

The scriptural words concerning 'praarabdha' apply to the sages who have to undergo physical pain and illness like any other human being, because of the predestination — no matter they are spiritually free. Such a seer looks upon his physical ailments as part of his 'praarabdha karma' and takes them in his stride, because once they are gone through there is no more suffering left for him in his present 'jeevanmukti' state of liberation even while alive and because after the end of this life there is no more rebirth for him.

If indeed a man is a realised soul (Jnaani), he has less reason to act as he pleases than the ignoramus, for the former has the greater responsibility of setting the world a good example.

Even otherwise, he could not have become a 'jnaani'. unless he had formerly put in a mighty noble effort which included penance, vows, consecration and similar virtuous acts. Such a person would never again indulge in evil acts, even if he were to know that the soul is unaffected by the bodily deeds. Anyway, the 'praarabdha' that induces him to act so nobly would not, for the same reason, make him act meanly.

Again, let me remind you that 'praarabdha' is merely the law of cause and effect. If you sow a mango seed it will not grow as a coconut tree.

Janma-antara-sahasreshu tapo-dhyaana-samaadhibhih
Naraaṇaam ksheeṇa-paapaanam Krishṇe bhaktih prajaayate

(It is by virtue of the penance, meditation and trance that have been accomplished during the course of a thousand former births, man begets the devotion to God).

This was the view of Sage Narada.

In this connection you must remind yourself of the words of Lord Krishna also :

Bahoonaam janmanaam ante jnaanavaan Maam prapadyate.

(The man of wisdom attains to Me, only after many births — of active good deeds).

We read elsewhere ;

Praksheeṇa-aśesha-paapaanaam jnaana-dhyaane bhavet matih

Paapopahata-buddheenaam tat-vaartā api sudurlabhaa

(It is only for those people whose sins are washed away completely, by means of their good works, that it is possible to direct the mind towards meditation and self-knowledge. To the evil-minded, even hearing about such an attempt would be unthinkable).

Jnaanam utpadyate pumsaam kshayaat paapasya karmaṇah

(Man's knowledge begins to take root only when the field of his mind is completey cleared of the weeds of sin).

The same mango fruit yields different tastes duing the different stages of its growth. The bitter, sour and sweet tastes of the fruit may be likened to the Tamas, Rajas and Sattva modes of human evolution. Just as the ripe fruit does not have the bitter and sour tastes left in it any more, so also in the man of wisdom, only the 'sattva' is left and there is no more room for 'Rajas' and 'Tamas'. And, according to the Gita, "Sattvaat sanjaayate jnaanam" (from the noble mode of 'sattva' results the knowledge of the Supreme Self), as we shall presently see.

So let me repeat that your 'Raaja Yogi', if he is really that, would not do the evil deeds he excuses in himself and in others.

Let the Gita confirm my views :

Rajah tamah cha abhibhooya sattvam bhavati, Bhaarata !
Rajah sattvam tamah cha eva tamah sattvam rajah tathaa

(The '*sattva*' mode supersedes both *Rajas* and *Tamas; Rajas* rejects both *Sattva* and *Tamas; Tamas* has nothing to do with *Rajas* and *Sattva).*

A man is either a 'Raaja Yogi' or not. If he is a Raaja Yogi, he cannot have anything to do with evil practices — regardless of the fact that the realised soul is unaffected by both good and evil.

Sattvaat sanjaayate jnaanam rajasah lobhah eva cha
Pramaada-mohau tamasah bhavatah ajnaanam eva cha

(Knowledge is the fruit of 'sattva': parsimony is the offspring of 'rajas'; ignorance, error and delusion, are the products of 'tamas'),

Where there is sunlight there is no darkness. Where there is a real philospher, who is by precept and example showing the light of knowledge to the sincere seekers of truth, there is no

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place for the false prophets. Nor is there any need on the part of the true Yogi to perform miracles. All that he needs is to act without detachment. The world at large will then slowly learn by his example that it too can gradually win the liberation from soul-shackling 'samsaara'.

Question : Holy Father, I request you to explain further the protestations of the modern 'Raaja Yogis', to the effect that they are one with the Absolute and that they are in no way affected by the behaviour of the sense-organs that fulfil their functions according to their respective nature. Incidentally, these 'Yogis', in the name of 'Guru Pooja' (prayerful serive to the Teacher), are promoting the habits of eating and acting in a reprehensible way. Please unravel this mystery, sir!

Answer : As I say, these are the "Raakshasa Bhogi"s (demoniac pleasure-lovers) who masquerade in the garb of "Raaja Yogi"s.

You know that the sense-organs by themselves do not have the motive power to act. It is the mind that activates them. Like the lifeless clay which is moulded by the potter into a pot, these elemental inactive senses are motivated by our consciousness.

The eye is, according to our epistemology, the repository of the fire element; the ear, that of the sky element; the tongue, that of the water element; and, likewise, the other twenty-one natural forces (Tattvas) are the effects of the inconscient matter produced by the five elements (earth, water, fire, air and sky).

Hence you cannot say that the sense-organs enjoy themselves by themselves.

Nor can you say that it is the Self or the Soul that enjoys the active functions of the body, because the soul is without attributes, shape, form, name and condition, and is eternally unattached to any manifest function. Although it is justifiable on the part of Advaita to explain away the action of what is called 'inconscient' (jada) by its association 'with' Maayaa' (the outward creative principle located in the Absolute), the idea cannot be easily accepted or understood by the normal mind. So Madhvacharya, the exponent of Dwaita, could disprove (of course, according to his lights) the Adwaita contrast between the inconscient matter and the ever-conscious Atman. That is, since the sense-organs are not independently active, and since the attributeless Soul cannot be said to be activating the senses, there must be an independent "Jeeva" (individual self) which is or who is as real as God or Soul.

From the standpoint of transcendent philosophy or pure science, which accepts that matter is only a form of energy and all that really exists is only energy — like the Advaintin's sole reality of The Universe Self —, this Dwaita contention would appear to be too specious to be true. But, as I said before, to the layman this Dwaita philospy is practicably more appealing. Especially, to leave no room for the wrong and misleading interpretation of the *soi-disant* "Raaja Yogis", it is advisable to follow the precepts of Madhvacharya in the initial stages.

When the mind is cleansed by due Yogic practices, Advaita can be appreciated as the non-duality between the impure reflection of Maayaa in the individual Self and the pure reflection of Maayaa in the Cosmic Self as it is resolved in the awareness of the "one without a second", supremely-pure Supracosmic Self.

Lords Krishna showed the way to such Self-realisation:

Ye tu Aksharam anirdeśyam avyaktam paryupaasate
Sarvatragam achintyam cha kootastham achalam dhruvam
Samniyamya indriyagraamam sarvatra sama-buddhayah
Te prāpnuvanti Maam eva sarva-bhoota-hite rataah

They who worship the Imperishable, the Ineffable, the Unmanifest, the Omnipresent, the Inconceivable, the Changless, the Immovable and the Constant - by restraining their sensuality, by preserving an equable temper in every circumstance and by rejoicing in the welfare of others as much as they do in their own - undoubtedly attain to Me).

But the Lord Himself knows how difficult it is to master such a step :

Kleśàh adhika-tarah teshaam avyakta-aasakta-chetasaam
Avyaktaa hi gatih duhkham dehavadbhih avaapyate

(There are innumerable obstacles, caused by the instinctive forces, that have to be surmounted by these worshippers of the un-manifest — for, the way of realising the non-manifest Ultimate Reality is hard to tread for the man, whose soul is encased in physical clay).

These verses from 'Bhakti Yoga' demonstrate the fact that the way of knowledge is not possible for the ordinary mortals. As 'Karma Yoga' (way of Action) was earlier prescribed for the lowly seeker, 'Bhakti Yoga' (way of the Devotion) is being taught for the midle intellect (needless to say, the 'Way of Knowledge' can be pursued only by those noble souls who have attained inner and outer purity, full self-control and the 'saadhana chatushtaya', as defind earlier).

Let us now consider the contention that the sense-organs go about their functions automatically. Every one agrees that there is no effect without a cause — just as there can no bubbles or waves without water in the sea. Similarly, if a man has a wish it must be that his nature is productive of that thought. This cannot be demonstrated by sight. It is known by inference (anumaana pramaana), as in the case of the smoke that appears on a hill-top giving you the idea that there is fire behind or above the hill, even though you cannot actually see the fire.

We can find out the mode of the individual's nature, according to his behaviour.

If the 'Raaja Yogi' is fond of meat and liquor, we can easily say that his nature is that of 'tamas'; if he looks at a woman with desire, he may be said to be of the 'Raajasika' nature; and of course the genuine Raaja Yogi transcends even the noble 'sattva guna' with which he is fundamentally equipped (the aspirant to Raaja Yoga is naturally born with 'sattva guna').

When you smell the breath of a person who has eaten garlic, although the process of eating is over, you can find out that he or she his fond of garlic. Likewise, a Yogi fond of the qualities that denote a particular mode can be determined to be no Yogi at all — the sole exception being the 'sattva guna' which means that he is on the right track to Yogihood.

Even though the sense-organs belong to the same body, you cannot see with ears, or hear with the eyes. The Yogi who has achieved control over his mind is in perfect communion with the soul. He will not be attracted by the senses, as, for instance, a woman and a man are mutually attached. He lets his bodily functions do their duty in so far as they let the body survive, but otherwise he treats alike a child or a grown woman. In olden days the way of knowledge was preached only to those who have mastered the "sadhana chatushtaya", for, it would not only be wasted on an impure intellect but will also lead it astray.

The Gita explains :

Trividhaa bhavati śraddhaa dehinaam saa swabhaavajaa
Saattvikee raajasee cha eva taamasee cha iti taam śṛṇu

(The characteristic faith of man is of three kinds – the noble, the mediocre or passionate, and the dull or lowly. I will now describe them).

Sattva-anuroopaa sarvasya śraddhaa bhavati, Bhaarata !
Śraddhaa-mayah ayam purushah yah yat-śraddhah sah eva sah

(The individual's faith follows his inborn character. The mode of faith which he displays denotes the characteristic nature pertaining to his mode).

Dear friend, you talked about the food and drink of the modern 'Raaja Yogi'. Please hear what the Lord has to say :

Aayuh-sattva-bala-aarogya-sukha-preeti-vivardhanaah
Rasyaah snigdhaah sthiraah hridyaah aahaaraah saattvika-priyaah

(The people of 'saattvic' nature eat the food which is conductive to longevity, vitality, strength, health, happiness and contentment, and which is sweet or soft or nutritive or tasteful).

Katu amla lavaṇa ati-ushṇa teekshṇa rooksha vidaahinaah
Aahaaraah raajasasya ishṭaah duhkha-śoka-maya-pradaah

(The passionate people like the food that is bitter or sour or salty or too hot or pungent or harsh or burning — causing the eater eventual distress and delusion).

Yaata-yaamam gata-rasam pooti paryusitam cha yat
Ucchishtam api cha amedhyam bhojanam taamasa-priyam

(The dull-witted prefers his meals to be spoiled by time, devoid of essence, putrid, stale, refuse-like — tasted by another and refused — and impure).

Among the already-tasted (ucchishta) meals, those refused by the husband may be taken by the wife; and those left over by the teacher may be eaten by the pupil.

We can judge the character of the thirsty wayfarer thus : the noble one seeks milk; the mediocre, bitter liquid; and the dull-witted, the foul-smelling toddy.

And the general guidance for the noble eater is this :

Su-snigdha-madhurah chaturtha-amśa-vivarjitah
Bhujyate Śiva-sampreetyai mita-aahaarah sah uchyate

(The right kind of limited diet is that which is soft and sweet: the eater must leave the table filling his belly only three-fourths – the one-fourth must be left for the "digestive air", and he must eat, as though he were pleasing the God within).

The idea is that the human body is the temple of God.We must eat only to keep the manifest God alive within us: the sort of food we offer the God within us gives us in return the quality that is in keeping with it.

And always remember that when you eat you must be in a happy frame of mind, which is possible only if you offer your food as an oblation to the God within you, and if you eat a truly 'saattvic' food.

I am sure all this cleared your doubt about the licence the Raaja Yogi of dubious character allows himself and his misguided followers.

INDISCRIMINATE EATING

Katu amla teekshna lavana-ushna hareeta śaaka
Sauvira taila tila sarshapa madya matsyaan
Bhaaga ati-maamsa-dadhi-takra-kuluttha-kola-
Pinyaaka-hingula-śunaadyam apathyam aahuh

(The impure food is generally defined as that which is bitter sour, pungent, saltish, hot, greenish, dregs-like, oily, spicy, filled with liquor ; cooked with fish and the flesh of dead animals, using soured curd or butter-milk, asafoetida, garlic and ignorance -breeding pasty ingredients).

Of course, some of the foods are not taboo to the ordinary man. The strict regimen following this verse is meant only for the Yogic practitionar. However, it is in the interests of the seeker after self-knowledge to follow this advice as far as practicable.

PROPER DIET

Godhooma śaali yava shaashtika śobhana-annam
Ksheera-aajya kanda navaneeta asitaa madhooni
Sunthee patolaka phalaadika pancha saakaah
Mudgaadi divyam udakam iha Yameendra-pathyam

(The kind of food that best suits the Yogic practitioner, seeking sense-control, is made up of wheat, paddy, pure grain, ghee, butter, sugar, honey, green gram, spinach and clear water).

It needs no reiteration that the food one eats has a great bearing on one's character, and that is why Hatha Yoga Pradeepikaa prescribed this diet for the Yogi.

Lord Krishna also has some wise counsel for us:

Yukta-aahaara vihaarasya yukta-cheshtasya karmasu
Yukta-swapna-avabodhasya Yogah bhavati
aduhkhahaa

(The joy-yielding Yogic communion is within the easy reach of the practitioner who is frugal in diet, temperate in recreation, self-restrained in his actions, and whose hours of sleeping and being awake are well-regulated).

Other authorities advise:

Mita-aśanah bhavet nityam bhikshuh moksha-paraayanah
Kaama-krodha-aadayah doshaah na bhavanti mita-aśanaat

(The mendicant who seeks Salvation must always eat frugally. By virtue of frugal diet, the evils of lust, wrath and the like do not assail man).

Abhyaasa-śooraaya jita-indriyaaya
Śivau gurau bhakti-su-niśchayaaaya
Deyam rahasyam bhava-yoga-śaastram
Yah moodha-daataa guru-paatakee syaat

(This mystic, godly science of Yoga must be taught only to someone who is dedicated to regular practice, who has his senses under control, and who is firmly devoted to God and to his Teacher. He who imparts it to a gluttonous dunce would be guilty of treachery to his teacher).

Similarly Lord Krishna also warns:

Idam te na atapaskaaya na abhaktaaya kadaachana
Na cha aśuśrooshave vaachyam na cha Maam yah
abhyasooyati

(Never pass on this sacred message of the Gita to anyone who is not given to penance, who is not pious, who is not service-minded and who thinks ill of Me).

Lord Shiva counsels similarly about his Guru-geetaa:

Abhakte vanchake dhoorte paashande naastikaadishu
Manasaa api na vaktavyaa Guru-geetaa kadaachana

(Let alone direct teaching, even the thought of teaching a non-devotee, a deceiver, a rogue, a heretic and an atheist, should never be entertained – as concerns this Guru-geetaa).

FAREWELL TO FALSE PROPHETS

Na vandaneeyaah te kashṭam darŝa-hrit-bhraanti-kaarakaah
Varjayet taan guroon doore dheerasya tu samaaŝrayet

(Alas, they are not in the least worthy of respect — the misguided and misguiding teachers, whose presence itself would cause frightful bewiiderment to the pupil. Verily they must be completely shunned, and the pupil must look to a genuine teacher, who practises what he preaches, instead).

Paashanḍinah paapa-rataah naastikaah bheda-buddhayah
Stree-lampaṭaah duraachaaraah kritaghnaah baka-vrittayah
Karma-bhrashṭaah kshamaa-nashṭaah nindya-tarkaih cha vaadinah
Kaaminah krodhinah cha eva himsraah chanḍaah ŝaṭhaah tathaa
Jnaana-luptaah na kartavyaah mahaa-pāpaah tathaa, Priye!
Ebhyah bhinnah guruh sevyah eka-bhaktyaa vichaarya cha

(Dear one, one must always avoid such teachers: heretics, sinners, atheists, schemers, womanisers, ill-mannered and ungrateful people, indulging in showy penance; the persons who do not perform their appointed duty; impatient persons; sophists indulging in casuistry; lustful, angry, violent and dull people, who are averse to true knowledge and fond of evil deeds.

On the other hand, one must always seek a good teacher who is exactly unlike the bad men just described, and then serve him with devotion and sincerity).

Thus did Lord Shiva tell his beloved consort, Paarvati, accorping to Skaanda Puraanam.

NATURE OF THE TRUE MYSTIC

Question : Again, sir, there are others who call themselves 'Avadhootas' or the perfect ascetics, who also maintain that as long you have self-knowledge you can outwardly behave as you please. Kindly explain their words, revered sir!

Answer : Please learn the real meaning of the term, 'Avadhoota':

Kaamaih ahatah dheeh daantah mṛduh ŝuchih akinchanah
Aneehah mita-bhuk ŝaantah sthirah Mat-ŝaraṇah munih

(The Avadhoota is unaffected by lust; he is wise, steadfast, soft-spoken, pure, frank, dispassionate, frugal, peaceful and steady; he is a seer who looks upon God as his sole refuge).

Apramattah gabheera-aātmaa dhritimān jita-shaṭ-guṇah
Amaanee maanadah kalpah maitrah kaaruṇikah kavih

(He is ever-awake in God-consciousness; serene and soulfully brave; he conquers his internal enemies; he has no sense of false dignity; he respect others; he is imaginative, friendly, merciful and all-knowing).

Kripaaluh akrita-drohah titikshuh sarva-dehinaam
Satya-saarah anavadya-aatmaa samah sarva-upakaarakah

(He is compassionate and does not injure anyone; he forgives the misdeeds of all; he is truthful, pure-minded, and helpful to all living creatures).

Avadhoota-lakshaṇam varṇaih jnaatavyam bhaagavat-tamaih
Veda-varṇa-tattvajnaih Veda-Vedaanata-vaadibhih

(Each of the four letters, *A, Va, Dhoo, Ta,* has a special significance: thu scan an *Avadhoota* be understood — only by supreme devotees, knowers of the Vedic terminology and the scholars well-versed in scripture and metaphysics).

Aaŝaa-paaŝa-vinirmuktah aadi-madhya-anta-rahitah
Aanande vartate nityam A-kaarah tasya lakshaṇam

(The first letter in 'Avadhoota' denotes the person who is free from the bonds of greed; who makes no distinction between time past and present, or between time present and future; and who ever stays in soulful blessedness).

Vaasanaa varjitaa yena vaktavyam cha niraamayam
Vartamaaneshu varteta Va-kaarah tasya lakshaṇam

(The second letter in 'Avadhoota' signifies the person who is detached from the worldly attractions, who is healthy in mind, body and spirit, and who lives blissfully in the eternal present).

Dhooli-dhoosara-gaatrah cha dhoota-chittah niraamayah
Dhaaraṇaa-dhyaana nirmuktah Dhoo-kaarah tasya lakshaṇam

(The third letter in 'Ava*dhoo*ta' connotes the person whose uncounsciousness of his bodily function and physical nature may find him covered with dust; whose mind is fully cleansed and healthy; and whose consciousness, being ever immersed in Soul-awareness, is released from earthly attachments).

Tattva-chintaa dhritaa yena chintaa-vivarjitah
Tamo'hankaara-nirmuktah Ta-kaarah tasya lakshaṇam

(The final letter in 'Avadhoota' symbolises the person who is ever occupied in philosphical concentration, who is delivered from worldly botherations, and who is free from dullness and egoism).

As you see, the people who pamper themselves and who lead sensual lives, all the while shouting from housetops that they are 'Avadhoota's, do not answer to the real description of that term.

And then,

Aatmaanam cha amṛtam hitvaa, abhinnam moksham avyayam
Gatah hi kukshi-tarka-amśah vartate narakam prati

(He who forsakes the genuine understanding of the eternal non-dual Self, which yields unending bliss, but who takes delight in propagating empty ideals full of mercenary logic would only go to hell).

That much has been made clear in the book, "Avadhoota Geetaa", by sage Dattaaatreya.

In this context it has to be remmbered that the words "Jnaani" "Avadhoota", "Raaja Yogi", "Samnyaasi" and "Mukta" are synonymous. The etymological meaning of 'Avadhoota' is one whose mind is perfectly cleansed. That is, he who realises that his real self is not any of the manifestations concerning the twenty four 'tattva's (natural forces) — comprising the five congitive senses, the five active senses, the five sensations of sound, touch, form, essence and smell, and the four mental facets of mind, intellect, consciousness and ego — , by the transcendent contemplation of Man and Nature, is the Avadhoota. Likewise, the Sannyaasi — literally meaning, the good renouncer—decides that these twenty-four manifestations are not the real Self which is defined by the Upanishat as *"Neti, Neti"* (neither cause nor effect) but the ever-remaining uncaused Cause, the Brahman, with which the realised soul identifies himself by means of the 'Mahaa-Vaakya', *"Aham Brahamāsmi"*. The derivation of 'Raaja Yogi, comes from "raajit" — that which shines — and "yujyate" — that which unites — : that is, the individual self shines, released from the bonds of the twenty-four worldly manifestations, in its union with the Universal Self. "Jnaani" is the one who knows that "God is pure Knowledge", as the second 'Mahaavaakyam,' (mighty dictum), *"Prajnaanam Brahma"* says. 'Mukta' or "Jeevat-Mukta" is the one who realises here and now his unity with God. That the individual consciousness is not separate from the all-pervading consciousness of God is the Self-realisation that liberates man from his self-imposed bondage to his senses. The third 'mahaavaakyam', *"Tat tvam asi"* (That Thou art) means the same thing. And the fourth 'mahaa-vaakyam' categorically declares that all this consciousnses of the individual Self is nothing but the Supreme Consciousness of God: "Ayam Aatmaa Brahmaa".

Just as the study of materia medica does not help a man to cure oneself, but the right medicine taken along with proper diet, so also do not the study of the scriptures and the vocal claims of being a 'Raaja Yogi' bring one salvation, but the transcendentally felt and experienced union with the Absolute.

The beggar who wins a big lottery would not roam the streets again to beg. So also would not the real Raaja Yogi or Avadhoota go back to the life of weary worldliness once he attains his union with God.

And does the Lord say that the self-realising man would crave the delights of tongue and touch, as these so-called Avadhootas and Raaja Yogis do? Please listen:

Yah tu aatma-ratih eva syaat aatma-triptah cha maanavah
Aatmani eva cha santushtah tasya kaaryam na vidyate

(He who takes delight in his inner self and is contented with his self-knowledge, besides finding the true bliss within himself no longer seeks the earthly actions or pleasures).

But this applies only to the genuine, Avadhoota', let it be reiterated.

Sankaracharya adds, in his "Viveka Choodamani" :

Vijnaata-Brahma-tattvasya yathaa poorvam na samsrtih
Asti chet na sah vijnaata-Brahma-bhaavah bahih-mukhah

(To the one who realises the identity with God, there is no more connection with the world of 'samsaara' ; if he does have such a worldly relationship, he is not a realised soul but a slave to the outward functions of the senses).

'Uttara Geetaa' clinches the issue:

Jnaana-amrtena trptasya krta-krtyaaya yoginah
Na cha asti kinchit kartavyam asti chet na sah tattvavit

(To the man who is contented with the nectar of self-knowledge, and who is a Yogi in perfect communion with God, there is nothing left to be done on the worldly plane; if he still craves the worldly pleasure, he is not a true man of knowledge or a true Yogi).

So it must be clear to you that the people who like to act in a manner that can be construed as doing worldly works are neither Raaja Yogis nor Avadhootas.

GOODBYE TO INTOXICANTS

Question : Sir, one does not disagree with your stand against the eating of meat and the drinking of liquor, but there are some wanderings monks (Saadhus) who maintain that 'Ganja' (a sort of intoxicant drug) is useful in the process of meditation. The modern spiritual teachers not only use the drug but also allow their disciples its use — with the contention that the 'Gunja' is the provider of holy inspiration to each seeker according to his needs, whether he seeks self-knowledge or Yogic communion or preaching powers. Is this true, revered sir?

Answer : I too in my contacts with these 'Saadhus' heard the same argument. Besides, they were even saying that the effect of the impure water they drink on their wanderings all over the country is offset by the 'Ganja' they smoke. Some other Saadhus claim that its usage wards off the untoward effects of living in the cold climate of hilly regions.

But, dear friend, all these are mere excuses which all the addicts all over the world offer to justify their personal weakness. The use of 'Ganja' has many deleterious effects. In the initial stages none can escape the severe cough it causes. In due course the addict suffers from ulcers in the stomach. Actually, doctors have been advising the Government to put a ban on its use. It is no longer freely obtainable in the market.

As for its good effects, no doubt it causes the mind some momentary peace. But it is not the kind of peace that one gets from divine knowledge or transcendent meditation. This self-forgetfulness derived from 'Ganja' is no better than the anaesthesia that the patient is administered before a surgical operation.

Gradually the memory and the self-control of the addict are adversely affected. When it is not available or when the mendicant cannot afford it, the mental and physical torture he goes through, and the depths he stoops down to in his search for the means to buy it, can only be imagined but cannot be adequately described.

If really it provides the kind of relaxation each sort of seeker needs, would the Government ban its use?

Indeed, even the people who patronise the addicts are guilty, as this verse from Padma Puraanam asserts:

Dhoomapam Vaishṇavam daanam ye kurvanti naraah iha
Daataarah narakam yaanti Vaishṇavah graama-sookarah

(The people who give alms to the smoking devotee go to hell, for such a devotee is no better than a stray pig).

The donors are also blamed, for the simple reason they are helping the further degradation of a devotee with bad habits.

Indeed it is easier to control the senses and obtain deliverance through the right means than to get 'ganja' and to get rid of its habit-forming evil effects.

The Acharyas who formulated the three main creeds of Hinduism, Advaita, Dvaita, and Visishtaadvaita, have denounced the use of any intoxicant drug.

At first the monks in the northern mountainous regions got used to this drug to ward off cold and to promote their digestive process, which the sweet foods of the North make somewhat sluggish. But only the lesser men among the Saadhus needed this drug. Not the real realised souls. Today you can visit the noble Saadhus in the coldest region in the North, but you will not see them imbibing 'Ganja'; their mental power which conquered the physical debility is more forceful than any material benefit that 'Ganja' gives. All the major monasteries there have banned its use.

Nothing that makes you so slavish as to make a begger of you is congenial to self-realisation. Sankaracharya truly said:

"Laghutva-moolam kim arthitaa eva, gurutva-moolam yat ayaachanam cha" (there is nothing meaner than begging, nothing nobler than non-begging). This does not apply to the food which the mendicant-seer receives ("bhikshaannam") from the pious householder.

Above all, the thing that enjoys the peace, as a result of using 'ganja', is not the real 'I' in you, but the 'sensuous' mind which is one of the five 'sheaths' that cover the soul.

The sages have divided happiness into two kinds — the one that is dependent on external means and the other that comes from within.

Niraalambam samaaśritya saalambam nijahaati yah
Sah sannyaasee cha yogee cha kaivalyam padam aśnute

(The person who deserts the dependent means of pleasure and embraces the independent way of life is the real ascetic and Yogi; he alone is fit for eternal beatitude), says the Niraalamba Upanishat.

Need it be reminded that the pleasure of 'ganja' is a *dependent* one?

And Lord Krishna proclaims :

Maatraa-sparśaah tu, Kaunteya! śeeta-ushṇa-sukha-duhkhadaah
Aagamaapaayinah anityaah taan titikshasva Bhārata

(The sense-organs, when they come into contact with their objects, cause heat and cold, pain and pleasure. These are momentary feelings that come and go. So, Arjuna, you must be able to put up with these transient trifles).

So you see the great sages should be able to put up with the transitory effects of outward climate and physical contacts. (The instruction to Arjuna, the 'nara' or man, by Krishna, the 'Naaraayana' or God, is meant for all men, offered through the eternal goodwill and grace of a benign Providence or God).

And so:

Yam hi na vyathayanti ete purusham, Purusharshabha!
Sama-duhkha-sukham dheeram Sah amritatvāya kalpate

(O mighty man, please note that the man who is not affected by these external dualities, and who treats alike pain and pleasure, is fit for Immortality).

Is it not crystal clear that forbearance, and not 'ganja', is needed for the immortal, eternal peace of the soul?

Question : If 'Ganja' does not have useful effects, why do so many Saadhus still take to it?

Answer : Well, there are so many drunkards who do not mind putting themselves and their families to innumerable difficulties to placate their bad habit. Do you think they do so because drink is a good thing ?

Men in general pursue bad habits only by their propensity to evil and evil practices :

Gataanugatikah lokah na lokah pāramārthikah
Setau sikata lingena vinashtam taamra-bhaajanam

(Men imitate one another, without thinking of the essential meaning or ultimate reality of things. As in the case of the sage who took a dip in the sea, hiding his tumbler under a sandhill, to keep it safe from being stolen, but who could not recover it — for, those outsiders who saw his action, but not the tumbler, followed his example, under the impression that he was consecrating the idol of Lord Shiva — among the myriad sandhills formed by the unimaginative onlookers, many people follow another's example without giving it careful thought).

Question : Among these users of 'Ganja' we find many intellectuals who are able to converse in many languages—like English, Sanskrit, Hindi, Tamil and Telugu. If the drug dulls intellect, how is it possible that these men could become such fluent linguists ?

Answer : Mere utterance of language, bereft of the inward mastery of the import of the words, is comparable to the gramophone record which, for example, reproduces the recitation of Bhagavad Gita — without experiencing the sacred message.

Vaak-vaikharī śabda-jharee śaastra-vyaakhyaana-kauśalam
Vaidushyam vidushaam tadvat bhuktaye na tu muktaye

(The literary skill of the pedants, who exhibit their word-power, lecturing eloquence, and critical faculty, is merely to earn the daily bread but not to realise Salvation).

Śabda-jaalam mahaa-aranyam Chitta-bhramana-kaaranam
Atah prayatnaat jnaatavyam tattvajnaat tattvam Aatmanah

(The wide net of large vocabulary is spread over a huge forest around which aimlessly wanders the non-self-realising mind. Therefore by sincere effort one should try to learn from a true scholar the truth about the Absolute), says Viveka Choodaamani of Sankaracharya.

The sick man does not have to study medicine; he has only to consult a good doctor. Similarly, the seeker needs no linguistic ability but the simple self-knowledge that comes of the soulful realisation of the import of mighty dicta like "Aham Brahmaa asmi" (I am one with the Universal Spirit).

Lord Krishna says in the Uttara Geetaa:

Aalochya chaturah Vedaan dharma-śaastraani sarvadaa
Yah "Aham Brahma" na jaanaati darvee paaka-rasam yathaa

(He who always studies the four Vedas and the sacred books, and yet does not soulfully realise the significance of "I am one with God", is like the spoon that serves food but cannot taste it).

Yathaa kharah chandana-bhaara-vaahee bhaarasya vettaa na tu chandanasya
Tathaa eva śaastraani bahooni adheetya saaram na jaanan kharavat vahet sah

(He who studies the scriptures, without experiencing their essence, is like the donkey that carries a load of sandalwood on its back, feeling only its weight but not its perfume).

Yathaa amrtena trptasya payasaa kim prayojanam
Evam tam paramam jnātvā Vede na asti prayojanam

(Just as the man, who is gratified by drinking the nectar, has no need of water, so also does not the man, who realised God, have any need to learn the mere linguistic content of the scriptures).

So, you see, friend, one may be a great linguist but still an ignoramus, as far as the supreme self-knowledge is concerned.

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DISCIPLES OF PSEUDO-PRECEPTORS

Question : Today we find many followers of the meat-eating, liquor-drinking Yogis. If these Yogis do not have great spiritual power, how would so many disciples flock around them?

Answer : You cannot judge the greatness of a Guru by the number of his pupils. Since time immemorial there have been false prophets enjoying a large following.

Misled by the big words or by the showy miracles which the pseudo-preceptors display, many unwary seekers approach them. Or it could be that the disciple himself is after such a showy fame as the Guru's. Even thieves have a large number of followers who want to learn the craft of stealing. We cannot, therefore, accept the worth of any one, by the mere fact that he has a wide following.

The real thing is to be able to approach God directly through devotion. When you light a spark of devotion it will slowly but surely develop into a large flame of knowledge, which automatically destroys the darkness of ignorance.

Hence, rather than seek a self-styled Guru, you should be con tent with achieving non-dual devotion.

THE WAY OF DEVOTION

Question : What is devotion, and of how many kinds is it? Please instruct me about its true nature, revered sir!

Answer : Dear friend, devotion is the most blessed thing in the life of man. Knowledge, no doubt, makes a man the equal of God. But that is within the reach of only a few. However, devotion is the bridge to Knowledge, and when the mind is purified by selfless action, devotion brings man nearer to God than any other austere practice. And devotion is possible only for those who love God more than any other thing on earth.

By the power of this Devotion, sages like Naarada, Uddhava, Vyaasa, Suka, Sanaka, Sanandana and Sanatkumaara, seers like Sankara, Raamaanuja and Madhva, and devotees like Prahlaada, Hanumaan and others, have attained Salvation.

Bhakti (devotion) is defined as "anuraktih pare tattve Bhaktih iti abhidheeyate" (the supreme love of the Absolute is said to be Devotion). Even though Sankaracharya is the great proponent of 'Knowledge', he admitted that Devotion is the highest means to Salvation (of course, 'Knowledge', being the End itself, has not been included among the means), by saying: "Moksha-saadhana -saamagryaam Bhaktih eva gareeyasee".

This devotion is said to be of nine kinds in Bhaagavatam:

Śravaṇam keertanam Vishṇoh smaraṇam paada-sevanam
Archanam vandanam daasyam sakhyam aatma-nivedanam

(1. Hearing the story or praise of God 2. Singing His praises 3. Remembering or chanting His name 4. Serving His feet — in the form of a symbolic image 5. Worshipping Him 6. Bowing to Him 7. Ministering to His glory 8. Befriending him 9. Self-surrender to Him).

These are the devotees who respectively represent each of the nine forms of Devotion:

1. King Pareekshit 2. Sage Naarada 3. Sage Suka 4. Prince Lakshmana 5. Emperor Prithu 6. Messenger Akroora 7 Divine bird Garuda and Divine monkey Hanumaan 8. Prince Arjuna 9. Emperor Bali.

These are but a few illustrations. But there are countless millions who followed their example and attained Salvation through one or all kinds of devotion.

This devotion is mentioned in eleven ways in the "Bhakti Sootra"s of Naarada:

Guna-maahaatmya-aasakti, Roopa-aasakti, Pooja-aasakti, Smarana-aasakti, Daasya-aasakti, Sakhya-aasakti, Kaanta-aasakti, Aatma-nivedana-aasakti, Tanmayataa-aasakti, Parama-viraha-aasakti, — Roopa-ekadhaa api ekaadasadhaa bhavati.

(Although in itself Devotion is single, it has eleven facets of manifestation: 1. Love of hearing the story of God 2. of seeing His form 3. of worshipping Him 4. of remembering Him 5. of serving Aim 6. of befriending Him 7. of being intimate with Him 8. of imagining Him as one's spouse 9. of surrendering oneself to Him 10. of being lost in meditating on Him 11. of longing for the spiritual union with Him).

The last-mentioned kind of devotion is of special significance. This is also called "Ekaanta Bhakti" (to be in solitary communion with God) and "Ananya Bhakti" (to love God as none other than one's own real Self) in the Gita. It is very hard to master these two kinds of Devotion. God follows such devotees, as the cow follows the calf.

This devotion is said to have four votaries in the Gita :

Chatuh-vidhaah bhajante Maam janaah sukṛtinah, Arjuna!
Aartah jijnaasuh artha-arthee jnaanee cha, Bharatarshabha!

(Four kinds of good people worship Me, the God: the one who wants to be saved from the ills of 'samasaara', the one who wishes to know the Spirit of God, the one who seeks material and spiritual wealth, and the one who is a man of knowledge).

Teshaam jnaanee nitya-yuktah eka-bhaktih visishyate
Priyah hi jnaaninah atyartham Aham sah cha Mama priyah

(Of these four kinds of devotees, the man of divine knowledge, "Jnaanee', who is ever in communion with Me and who worships Me as his own real Self, is the greatest. He is indeed very dear to Me as I am very dear to him).

While it is true that God is equal to all, there is always the difference between the men who approach Him and those who do not. In the cold weather fire warms the person who gets nearest to it. Then, though the fire is common to everyone in the room, it is said that it is nearest to that person, and that person is nearest to it. So also is God dearest to those who know Him as their superior Self. But it is not given to everyone to seek God thus, as the Lord Himself says:

Manushyaaṇaam sahasreshu kaśchit yatati siddhaye
Yatataam api siddhaanaam kaśchit Maam vetti tattvatah

(Among the thousands of men only one attempts self-realisation. And among those men who make that attempt only one understands Me in spiritual perfection).

We hear a similar passage in the Katha Upanishat also.

The Lord again speaks highly of Devotion:

Na Aham Vedaih na tapasaa na daanena na cha ijyayā
Śakyah evam-vidhah drashṭum drishṭavaan asi Maam yathaa

Bhaktyaa tu ananyayaa śakyah Aham evam-vidhah, Arjuna!
Jnaatum drashṭum cha tattvena praveshṭum cha, Parantapa!

(The way you, O Arjuna, have been able to see Me is possible only through non-dual devotion. Indeed, neither scriptures nor penance, neither charity nor sacrifical rites, enable one to know or see or enter Me as does the single-minded devotion to Me).

The "Bhakti Sootra"s of Naarada add:

"Anya-aasrayaanaam tyaagah ananyataa" (the non-dual devotion is that which does not think of anything else but God).

"Saa Tasmin parama-prema-roopaa cha" (it is also characterised by supernatural love of God).

"Amrita-swaroopaa" (it is of the nature of Immortality).

"Yat labdhvaa pumaan siddhah bhavati amritah bhavati triptah bhavati" (obtaining which, man becomes a realised soul, an immortal and a blissful one).

"Yat praapya na kinchit vaanchhati, na sochati, na dweshti, na ramate, na utsaahee bhavati" (obtaining which, man wants nothing else, regrets nothing, hates nothing, delights in nothing else, and does not rush to take part in worldly activities).

"Tat tu vishaya-tyaagaat sanga-tyaagaat cha"

(It is attained by abstaining from sensual pleasures and from evil company).

"Kah tarati? Kah tarati Maayaam? Yah sangaan tyajati, yah mahaanubhaavan sevate nirmamah bhavati"

(Who can escape the snare of 'Maayaa'? Only he who leaves aside his earthly attachments, serves a noble teacher, and is non-self-seeking in all his actions).

"Sah tarati, sah tarati, sah lokaan taarayati"

(Indeed, only such a person, freeing himself from the bonds of 'samsaara', is fit to free the rest of the world).

"Anirvachaneeyam prema-swaroopam"

(The devotee's love of God is indefinable: God is love, and His universal loving immanence cannot be separated into a particular entity to suit a wordy description).

"Stree-dhana-naastika-charitam na sravaneeyam"

(The true devotee must not indulge in, or hear, the talk about women, money and atheists — or he should not listen to the captivating talk of women, of the mercenary men, and of the non-believers).

"Na asti teshu jaati, vidyaa, roopa, kula, dhana, kriyaa-aadi bhedah"

(Among the devotees of God — who are all equal children of one God — there are no distinctions of caste, creed, shape, family, riches and employment).

"Ahimsaa, satya, saucha, dayaa, aastikatva-aadi charitraani paripaalaneeyaani"

(The virtues of non-violence, truth, purity, mercy and faith in God should never be relinquished .

"Tat-mayaah"

(They who non-dually pray to God become one with Him).

"Kantha avarodha, romaancha, asrubhih parasparam aalapamaanaah paavayanti kulaani prithiveem cha".

(The devotees, who mutually sing the praises of God, with their voices shaking with divine rapture, with their hairs standing on end in godly ecstasy, and shedding tears ot superlative happiness — , would not only sanctify their own families but the entire world around them'.

"Yah vivikta-sthaanam sevate, yah loka bandham unmoolayati, nistraigunyah bhavati, yah yoga-kshemam tyajati"

(He is the noblest devotee who loves solitary places, who uproots the worldly ties, who crosses the barrier of the three modes — Sattva, Rajas, Tamas — , and who cares little for earning or saving more money than he needs just for sustenance'.

"Tat eva saadhyataam, Tat eva saadhyataam"

(One must always seek the company of such noble souls or one must always seek such noble devotion).

"Labhyate api Tat kripayaa eva"

(Such noble company can be obtained only by deserving the grace of God through single-minded devotion).

We find several more similar inspiring aphorisms from that great book.

We read elsewhere:

Nṛṇām janma-sahasreṇa bhaktau preetih hi jaayate
Kalau bhaktih Kalau bhaktih bhaktyā Kṛṣṇah purah sthitah

(Only by virtue of good works through thousands of former births would a man beget the love of devotion; devotion is the

greatest thing to be obtained, especially in this age of Kali. And if one masters non-dual devotion, all the time uttering the name of 'Krishna' or a synonym of God, one is sure to bring God into his very presence here and now).

Na aapobhih na Vedaih cha na jnaanena api karmaṇaa
Harih hi saadhyate bhaktyaa pramaaṇam tatra Gopikaah

(None can accomplish the grace of God without devotion — not even penance, scriptural mastery or theoretical knowledge would help the seeker as much as the noble means of devotion: the proof of this is to be found in the lives of the *Gopikas* who could be bodily and spiritually united with God through their unselfish love and devotion to Krishna).

Satya-aadi tri-yuge bodha-vairagyan mukti-saadhakau
Kalau tu kevalaa Bhaktih - Brahma-saayujya kaariṇee

(During the first three ages — Satya or Krita, Tretaa and Dwaapara — wisdom and detachment were the main means to Liberation. But in this age of Kali, in which it is not easy for man to achieve such knowledge and renunciation, the easier and surer way to be united with God is through Devotion).

In this connection it must not be forgotten that Devotion is the bridge to self-realisation, whereas knowledge and Renunciation signify self-realisation itself. But wisdom and detachment, being very difficult to master, could be striven after, only in the earlier more virtuous ages. Is this age of discord — Kali Yuga — *Bhakti* is easier to pursue, and, as said earlier, it is the best means to Salvation.

Yat phalam na asti tapasaa na yogena samaadhinaa
Tat-phalam labhate samyak Kalau Kesava-keertanaat

(Penance, Yogic communion and trance are not practicable in the age of Kali; so whatsoever benefit they cannot yield, can, however, be obtained now through the chanting of the name of God).

Rather than waste one's time and energy on difficult means of salvation, the sacred books advise the modern man to take up the chanting of the name of God, the easiest form of Devotion. As one keeps on reciting the Lord's name, the divine qualities of His are reflected in one's own individual consciousness.

The way of action, through purity of mind, leads to devotion; and devotion, through the communion between man and God, finally leads to the union of the individual and the universal selves, which union is known as self-knowledge. Thus, in the ultimate analysis, all the varied ways lead to the same destination. That being so, it is futile to indulge in the polemics of Advaita, Visishtaadvaita and Dvaita. Let us leave such arguments to the academicians and stick to the non-dual Devotion that brings the Lord before our mental eye without fail and without much strenuous effort.

SPIRITUAL & MATERIAL WORSHIP

Question : Revered sir, which is better — worship of the Formless one or the God with form *(Saguṇa* or *Nirguṇa)*?

Answer : Devotion, no doubt, exists in both kinds of worship. But to begin with everyone needs a form to concentrate his or her attention on. An archer first practises with a fixed aim or target before he can dispense with the fixed aim. Similarly, before one can direct one's attention inwards, into the formless union with the Absolute, one needs to have an outward symbol to concentrate upon. Whatever idea you affix on the idol or image, it is mirrored in your consciousness, like auto suggestion. That is why the ancient seers advocated image-worship to start with. Even sage Maarkandeya worshipped the stone symbol of Lord Shiva with implicit faith in its actual representation of that God. So could Prahlaada accept his father's challenge and demonstrate the existence of Lord Narasimha in the pillar. The archer Ekalavya practised his art, by imagining his Guru in the clay-idol of Dronaachaarya. So did the devotee Raamadaas find Lord Raama in the temple at Bhadrachalam.

We have heard many credible episodes in which Lord Venkateswara appeared in person to those who worshipped His image — as in the case of Tarigonda Venkamaamba and Hattiraam Baavaajee. Likewise at Pandaripur the Lord Pundareeka Varada actually appeared before His sincere image-worshippers.

The story of Chidambaram, with the tangible miracles, is too well-known to need reiteration here. Many more are the examples of the benefits the sincere devotees derived from the mistakenly reviled idolatry.

ADVANTAGES OF IMAGE-WORSHIP

Question : But then, how and where should one set up the idol for the all-pervading Supreme Self ?

Answer : O noble devotee, it is true that the Absolute is all-pervasive. However, the Unmanifest cannot be apprehended unless it is attached to a manifest object.

Energy, electrical or otherwise, pervades the whole universe. And yet, it cannot be canalised without the aid of an external generating gadget. Such is the case with the omni-present God. For the benefit of His devotees he stimulates their intellects through His idols.

Although the idol is inanimate, it is still animated by the meditational and devotional energy of the one who prays to it, by extra-sensorily endowing it with godly powers.

It is for this reason that while worshipping the idols the worshipper says, for instance, "Namah Sivaaya" (salutations to Lord Shiva), but not "Namah paashaanaaya" (obeisance to the stone).

With whatever thoughts the devotees approach God, with similar thoughts does He reward them as Lord Krishna puts it :

"Ye yathaa Maam prapadyante taan tathaa eva bhajaami Aham".

And then, "Tattva Naaraayanam" has this to say :

Saguṇa-jnaana-heenasya na hi nirguṇa-vedanam
Nandi-darśana-heenasya yathaa na Śiva-darśanam

(Just as one has first to see the divine bull, Nandi, before going into the presence of Lord Shiva, so has one to imagine God in His idol before one can appreciate His formless omnipresence).

"Siva-yoga-pradeepikaa" adds :

Śiva-jnaanam dwidhaa jneyam saguṇam nirguṇam tathaa
Aadau saguṇaṁ aaśritya paśchaat nirguṇam aacharet

(One can approach God through His attributes or through His attributelessness. In any case, one has first to conceive God in on's favourite form before one can really grasp His formlessness).

Śiva-archana-viheenah yah pasuh eva na samśayah
Sah tu samsaara-chakre asmin ajasram parivartate

(Indeed, the man who does not worship God is equal to a beast, and he again and again gets caught in the wheel of 'samsaara').

Lord Krishna assures us :

Patram pushpam phalam toyam, yah Me bhaktyā prayacchati
Tat Aham bhakti-upahritam aśnaami prayata-aatmanah

(I will with glad alacrity accept any offering the devotee gives with due devotion — be it a leaf or a flower or a fruit or even mere water).

As you understand, you cannot offer such material gifts to the attributeless Absolute.

In the 'Bhaagavatam', Lord Krishna explains to Uddhava the nature of the idol :

Śailee daaru-mayee lauhee lepyaa lekhyaa cha saikatee
Mano-mayee maṇi-mayee pratimaa ashṭa-vidhaa smṛtaa

(God's image is made or conceived in eight ways: stone, wood, metal, paint, drawing, sand, mind and gem.)

Even if one does not have an idol before one, one can always imgaine God's form mentally : so one of the eight idols is called "mano-mayee".

Paśuh aatmaa aswatantrah cha chit-maatrah mala-dooshitah
Sammooḍhah nitya-samsaaree kinchit-jnah aneeśwarah akriyah

(The indiviudal self, devoid of divine awareness, is nothing but a beast, a servile being, a person of impurity who transitorily

mirrors the supreme consciouness; he is also a little-knowing helpless moron who for ever revolves in the vicious circle of 'samsaara').

Needless to say, if such an ignoramus equips himself with godly devotion, he will eventually become a man of knowledge — who is the equal of God.

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MENTAL PRAYER

Question : All the same, revered sir, is it not enough to pray to the God, who is in the human heart, in the heart itself ?

Answer : Yes, dear friend. But don't you remember that the Lord has in the Gita prescribed even for such people (who are capable of praying mentally) active devotion for the benefit of their fellow-men ?

Besides, nowadays it is hard to find a person who has the ability to concentrate his attention on God by merely imagining Him mentally.

If these false philosophers maintain that they are able to pray mentally, why cannot they say that they could eat mentally, and drink mentally, as well ? Or, if they are really aware of their soul and are not living in their body, why cannot they stay put at one spot ? Actually, they are going about begging for food or at least cheating the unwary to enable themselves to live in indolent luxury.

If idolatry is all that reprehensible, why was it that Lord Raama installed an idol of Lord Shiva at Rameswaram ? Why were so many idols of Lord Raama consecrated, on the banks of river Godavari, by the sages ? Why did the great philosopher-saint, Vyaasa, pray to the thousand images of Lord Shiva at Varanasi ?

We also see the temples of Vishnu or Shiva erected by saint-seers like Kapila, Naarada, Vasishtha, Bharadwaaja, Agastya, Bhrigu and Paraasara.

None can adequately describe the benefits that mankind derives from these idols and temples :

Kanchit kaalam Umaa-maheśa ! bhavatah paada-aravinda-archanaih
Kanchit dhyaana-samaadhibhih cha natibhih kanchit kathaa aakarṇanaih
Kanchit-kanchit avekshaṇaih cha nutibhih kanchit daśaam eedṛśeem
Yah praapnoti mudaa Tvat-arpita-manaah jeevan sah muktah khalu !

(O Lord, how gracious of you to ensure Liberation, even while alive, to the man who, for a while, worships your lotus feet; who spends some time in meditation and trance or bowing to you and hearing the sacred stories about you; who once in a way visits your shrine or sings your praises — as long as he gladly surrenders his heart to your blissful Self !).

So sings Sankaracharya in "Sivaanandalaharee".

Therefore, even if one spends very little time in particular acts of devotion, one should all the while be aware of the fact that there is a Higher Self that supervises one's living consciousness and should keep in mind that devotional awareness, at least.

All said, the overt acts of devotion are the best means to self-realisation, because the fickle-minded man cannot concentrate his attention on God, mentally, all the time.

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WAYS OF DEVOTION

Question : To whom should one pray ? And which kind of devotion is the best ?

Answer : As long as it is sincere devotion, the devotee can choose from among the incarnations of God any one who suits him best. Many seers attained liberation by praying to one of the three gods in the Trinity — Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Actually the Trinity is the threefold division of the Unity of God. If you prefer, you can imagine God in your own preceptor, or in any of the sacred sages like Dattaatreya or the blessed divinities like Subrahmanyeswara.

The " *Ś*iva Geetaa " says :

Daivee hi eshaa guṇa-mayee Mama Maayaa duratyayaa
Maam eva ye prapadyante Maayaam etaam taranti te

(It is not easy to cross the barrier of 'Maayaa' which is of the nature of the three fundmental modes of *Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.* But if one sincerely approaches Me with devotion he can do so.)

Sah eva labhate jnaanam Mat-bhaktah śraddhayaanvitah
Na anya-karmaaṇi kurvaaṇah janma-koṭi-śataih api

(He alone realises Self-knowledge, who prays to Me with constant faith and devotion. Other deeds done over a billion births, bereft of this devotion, whould be fruitless).

'Avadhoota Geetaa' maintains :

Eeśwara-anugrahaat eva pumsaam Advaita-vaasanaa
Mahaa-bhaya-paritraaṇaat vijnaanam upajaayate

(Only by deserving God's grace can one obtain a glimpse into the monistic knowledge of the Absolute. Such practically experienced non-dual knowledge saves man from the multitudinous fears of worldly life).

'Mahaa-Naaraayana Upanishat' proclaims :

"Kaaranena vinaa kaaryam na udeti; bhaktyaa vinaa Brahma-jnaanam kadaa api na jaayate; tasmaat tvam api sarva-upaayaan parityajya, Bhaktim aasraya".

(There is no effect without a cause; and never can one obtain God-consciouness without Devotion. So leave alone all other devices, and stick to Devotion for the fulfilment of your aim).

Just as a man who fell into a deep ditch needs another's assistance, so also does the man who is drowning in the sea of 'samsaara' need the grace of God or the help of a good Teacher to save himself.

—

ABOUT MANTRA-CHANTING

Question : What particular 'mantra' (sacred word or hymn) must be chanted, revered sir, to master such Devotion ?

Answer : 'Devotion' really means "single-minded love of God". If one does not have this in full, the chanting of any name would be of no avail. Indeed, if one is sure of feeling an inexpressible, true devotion for God, one has no need to chant any name at all.

The idea of the great sages in formulating the 'mantra' is to enable the fickle mind of man to find the needed concentration for God-realisation. Of course, even the *mantra*-chanting itself must be accompanied by unwavering devotion.

There are about seventy million 'mantra's; of these, the most prominent are "Raama Naama Taarakam", "Namah Śivaaya" and "Namo Naaraayanaaya". If one could utter these *mantras*, feeling within oneself the unity with the particular divinity, one could attain not only the four 'Purushaartha's (religious and dutiful well-being, material welfare, wish-fulfilment and liberation) but also all the 'siddhis' (miraculous powers).

And then, dear devotee, here is the real mystique : Devotion for God does not actually mean worshipping an entity outside of oneself. It is the feeling of identifying oneself with one's own superior Self, which is nothing but part and parcel of the all-pervading God.

Śankarāchārya says: "Swa-swaroopa-anusandhaanam Bhaktih abhidheeyate". (Devotion is experiencing one's real self in the concept of the Universal Self). In such a case the 'mantra' is merely 'AUM' : this single syllable represents the Unity of God, the Indestructible Word ('Akshara' etymologically means that which is 'Indestructible'), the essence of Veda and Vedaanta, and the identification of the Individual Self (Aham) with the 'God that is He' (Sah) in the chanting of "So'ham".

One must learn the significance of the Pranava Mantra (AUM) from one's Guru directly, besides receiving direct initiation in that prayerful recitation.

Lord Krishna tells Arjuna.

Yat Aksharam Veda-vidah vadanti, viśanti Yat yatayah veeta-raagaah
Yat icchantah brahmacharyam charanti, Tat te Padam sangraheṇa pravakshye

(I shall briefly teach you that sacred word, AUM, which is chanted by the Vedic seers. which is intuitively realised by the great sages, and wishing to master which the seeker embraces celibacy).

Sarva-dwaaraaṇi samyamya manah hṛdi nirudhya cha
Moordhni aadhaaya aatmanah praaṇam aasthitah Yogadhaaraṇaam

(Restraining all the sensual outgoings, confining the mind within the spiritual heart, and concentrating the life-force within the brain, the seeker must be established in Yogic practice).

'AUM' iti eka-aksharam Brahma vyaaharan Maam anusmaran
Yah prayaati tyajan deham sah yaati paramaam gatim

(He who leaves his mortal coil, remembering Me, aud uttering the godly syllable 'AUM'. would attain to the Supreme).

Similarly speaks Lord Yama in the Katha Upanishat :

Sarve Vedaah yat padam aamananti
Tapaamsi sarvaaṇi cha yat vadanti
Yat icchantah brahmacharyam charanti
Tat te padam sangraheṇa braveemi AUM iti etat

(I shall describe to you the syllable 'AUM', which is pre-eminently depicted by all the Vedas, which is chanted in all the penances, and desiring which the seekers embrace celibacy).

Etat hi eva Aksharam Brahma Etat hi eva Aksharam param
Etat hi eva Aksharam jnaatvaa yah yat icchati tasya tat

(This is the syllable, which is the indestructible Brahman as well as the Supreme Beatitude, and experientially learning which, the learner may obtain whatever he truthfully wishes).

Etat aalambanam śreshṭham etat aalambanam param
Etat aalambanam jnaatvaa Brahma-loke maheeyate

(This syllable is the greatest means to Salvation, the highest symbol of Heavenly Bliss : knowing its significance the knower prospers in the realm of the supreme spirit of Brahman).

'Śiva Geetaa' has this to say in this regard :

Evam Aatmaa araṇim kṛtvaa Praṇavam cha uttara-araṇim
Dhyaana-nirmathana-abhyaasaat saakshaat paśyati Maam janah

(He who makes his individual self the 'anterior' piece of fuel, and the sacred syllable 'AUM' the 'posterior' piece of fuel, and rubs the one against the other in the process of Yogic meditation. would at once produce the Fire of God and sees Me — God — directly).

The scripture says :

'Om'-kaara-prabhavaah Vedaah Om-kaara prabhavaah swaraah
Om-kaara-prabhavam sarvam trailokyam sa-chara-acharam

('AUM' is the source of the seven notes of music, and of all the manifestations of moving and non-moving entities in the three worlds).

Praṇavah hi Para-Brahma Praṇavah paramam padam
Praṇavam sarva-Veda-aadyam sarva-Veda-mayam viduh
Sarveshaam cha eva mantraaṇaam Praṇavah praaṇah uchyate

('AUM' is the supreme Brahman, the highest Bliss, the initial word as well as the core of all the Vedas, and the life-breath of all the Mantras).

Indeed any Mantra. without the sacred AUM to start with, is like the body without the head.

The Mundaka Upanishat asserts :

Praṇavah dhanuh, śarah hi Aatmaa, Brahma tat-lakshyam uchyate
Apramattena veddhavyam śaravat tat-mayah bhavet

('AUM' is the bow; the individual Self is the arrow; the universal Self is the target : when aiming at Salvation the seeker must be as one-pointed and single-directed in his resolve as the arrow that is aimed at the target).

By adding the word 'apramattena' — without losing concentration — , the Upanishat was suggesting that Deliverance is beyond the reach of the man who has no pure mind or subtle intellect.

'Uttara Geetaa' makes is further clear :

Taila-dhaaraam iva acchinnam deergha-ghanṭaa ninaadavat
Avāchyam Praṇavam praapyam yat tam veda sah Vedavit

(He indeed is the Vedic scholar who can accomplish within his soulfulness the sublimation of the ineffable 'AUM', with such ceaseless awareness as the flow of oil from on high and the sound of a bell that is rung for a long a while).

The scripture maintains :

"Yaavat jeevam japet mantram Praṇavam Brahmaṇah vapuh
Hrasvah dahati paapaani deerghah moksha-pradaayakah
Plutah tu sarva-siddhyai syaat Praṇavah tri-vidhah smritah

(One must recite the 'AUM', which is the embodiment of godhead, all the time. Uttered at single speed, it burns aways all

sins; at dual speed, it offers Liberation; and at triple speed, it confers all the miraculous powers), says "Sannyaasa Samuchchayah".

The 'Yoga Sootram' reminds us :

Tat-japah Tat-artha-bhaavanam

(While chanting 'AUM', or reciting the name of any favourite form of God, one must contemplate the qualities with which either the 'Pranava' or the deity is traditionally endowed).

During any kind of meditation, it need hardly be stressed, faith and devotion are the prerequisites.

KNOWLEDGE NEEDS COMMUNION

Question : Holy Father, it is said that Knowledge does not come to the man who does not undergo Yogic discipline. Is it so, sir ?

Answer : Well, yes. At the same time, it must be understood that Yogic practice is not mandatory for the seekers who have already achieved peace of mind; extreme devotion; absolute detachment; and the 'saadhana chatushtaya'.

But Yoga makes it easy for one to attain Knowledge. Still, the practice of Yoga is itself fraught with danger.

The people who depend on popular publications of Yogic exercises run the risk of endangering their health. The Aasanas (physical postures) and 'Praanaayaama' (breath - control) have both to be performed under the guidance of a competent preceptor. But the pity is that such preceptors are very rare in this age.

Great sages like Śankarāchārya, thanks to their frugal diet, had no need for physical postures, but they adopted the practice of 'Praanaayaama' and performed a few uncomplicated light Aasanas.

By means of 'Praanaayaama', one is assured of good health, mental concentration and self-control.

In all great sages we can find renunciation, knowledge and Yoga (communion) in equal proportions. The bird flying in the sky needs two wings and a tail : we may liken renunciation and knowledge to the two wings, and the tail to the Yoga.

Yoga-heenam katham jnaanam moksha-dam bhavati dhruvam
Tasmaat jnaanam cha yogam cha mumukshuh driḍham abhyaset

(How can one definitely attain the knowledge that results in Salvation, without Yogic communion ? So it is incumbent on the part of the seeker to practise Yoga firmly).

Sage Patanjali says :

Yogah chitta-vritti-nirodhah

(Yogic communion comes of the control of the workings and the wanderings of the mind).

The scriptures opine :

Yadaa pancha avatiṣṭhante jnaanaani manasaa saha
Buddhih cha na vicheshṭeta taam aahuh paramaam gatim

(That state is called Liberation when the Intellectual, Cognitive and Active functions of the senses, along with the mind, find themselves completely submerged in Self-realisation).

Taam Yogam iti manyante sthiraam indriya-dhaaraṇaam
Apramattah tadaa bhavati Yogah hi prabhava-apyayau

(Absence of Yoga is the cause of human distress. When all the senses are firmly controlled and the active communion is awake in the seeker, then it is said that he is experiencing true Yoga).

Skaanda Puraanam delcares :

Yathaa vahnih mahaa-deeptah sushkam ārdram cha nirdahet
Tathaa śubha-aśubham karma Yoga-agnih dahati kshaṇaat

(Just as a big fire burns up both wet and dry fuel, so also does Yogic communion destroy instantaneously the effects of both good and bad actions).

Ati-alpah-api yathaa deepah su-mahaan naaśayet tamah
Yoga-abhyaasah tathaa alpah api mahaa-paapam vinaaśayet

(Even as a little candle-light can dispel a huge darkness, a little well-performed Yogic practice destroys much sinfulness).

'Yogaat sanjaayate jnaanam, jnaanaat Muktih prajaayate' (Knowledge results from Yoga; Salvation, from knowledge).

Hatham vinaa Raaja-yogah, Raaja-yogam vinaa Hathah

(Without practical Yoga of excercise and breath-control, the mystic Yoga of supramental communion does not fructify; without the attainment of the mystic Raaja-Yoga, the mastery of the physical Hatha-yoga is useless).

Vritti-heenam manah kṛtvaa Kshetrajnam Paramaatmani
Ekee-kritya vimuchyeta Yogah ayam mukhyah uchyate

(The true Yoga is that which controls the sensual and mental functions, and merges in the omniscient Ultimate Reality — in which state the Yogic practitioner is released from all mundane bonds).

Dhyaanaat paapaani naśyanti dhyaanaat Moksham cha vindati
Dhyaanaat praseedati Harih dhyaanam sarva-artha-saadhanam

(By meditation can be conquered all the sins; by meditation can one gain Salvation; by Meditation can one please God. Indeed Yogic meditation is the all-purpose devotional practice).

The Gita asseverates :

Vedeshu yajneshu tapassu cha eva
Daaneshu yat puṇya-phalam pradishṭam
Atyeti tat sarvam idam viditvaa
Yogee param sthaanam upaiti cha aadyaam

(The Yogi begets the supreme state of self-knowedge and self-realisation, surpassing all the virtuous effects which are accredited to the study of scriptures, the performance of sacrificial rites and penance, and the giving of alms).

Aatma-poojaa samaa na asti poojaa Raghu-kula-udvaha!
Mat-saayujyam avaapnoti Chaṇḍaalah swa-aatma-poojayaa

(There is nothing that equals the worship of the Self within oneself. By realising through Self-prayer the identity of the individual self with the Universal Self, even an outcaste becomes united with Me — God).

The foregoing was spoken to Raama by Lord Shiva in the 'Siva Geetaa'.

Layah layah iti praahuh keedriśam laya-lakshaṇam
Apunarvaasana-utthaanaat layah vishaya-vismṛtih

(The real union or communion or merger with the Supracos-mic Spirit occurs only through the complete checking of the arising of the sensual cravings and of the comprehensive forgetful-ness of the physical impulses).

The "Raaja-Yogis" who boast of such things as being alive to their soul, and being indifferent to the worldly activities, really do not know what they are talking about, because they indulge in worldly activities without realising their soulful communion with God.

Jneya-vastu-parityaagaat vilayam yaati maanasam
Manasah vilaye jaate Kaivalyam avaśishyate

(By rejecting the impulse towards the external object the mind gets united with the soul. In this merger of the individual consciousuess with the Supreme, all that remains is the single Bliss of the realisation of the Unification of the One God with His various unreal names and forms, superimposed on Him by the unthinking mind, deluded by the changing reality of the illusory *Maayaa*).

Chitte chalati samsaarah, niśchale Mokshah eva hi
Tasmaat chittam sthiram kuryaat prajnayaa parayaa budhah

(The vicious circle of 'samsaara' moves around the fickle mind; if the mind is controlled, Liberation follows suit. So the wise man

should always exercise his supramental discretion and restrain his mental wandering).

Yaavat vileenam na manah na taavat vaasanaa-kshayah
Na ksheeṇaa vaasanaa yaavat chittam taavat na śaamyati

(As long as the mind is not submerged in soulfulness, the sensual impulses have free play; as long as the sensual attractions are unchecked, so long is the mind unpacified and unrestrained).

Na yaavat yaati vijnaanam na taavat chitta upaśamah
Yaavat na chitta-upaśamah na taavat tattva-vedanam

(Not until one really experiences soul-awareness would the waverings of the mind cease; not until the mind-wavering is checked could one realise true Knowledge).

And so, dear friend, always keep in mind the foregoing words from Yoga Vaasishtham, and see for yourself the reasons for the failure of the modern "Raaja Yogis" — and avoid such pitfalls.

MUTUALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND YOGA

Question : If, as you say, it is difficult to tread the path of Yoga, and if Yoga is an essential prerequisite to gain Knowledge, does it mean that there is no hope for the people who cannot accomplish the mastery of Yogic meditation, revered sir ?

Answer : But there is no obligation to master Yoga to gain knowledge. The Lord in his infinite mercy has shown us many ways to know the truth about Him. One can attain Salvation by following any one of those ways.

Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumaara and others found Deliverance in Yoga; Śuka, Soota and others, in Meditation; Naarada, Prahlaada and others, in Devotion; Vasishtha, Paraasara and others, in the Way of Action; Vaamadeva and others, in Knowledge; Janaka, Bhageeratha and others, in the life of a householder; Kapila and others, in epistemology; Viswaamitra and others, in penance; and Bharata and others, in renunciation.

The Gītā enlightens us on the subject :

Dhyaanena aatmani paśyanti kechit aatmaanam aatmanaa
Anye saankhyena yogena karma-yogena cha apare

(Some realise the Supreme Self through meditation; some, through the discriminant self-knowledge; some, through the intuitive understanding ; and some, through the way of selfless Action).

Anye evam ajaanantah śrutvaa anyebhyah upaasate
Te api cha atitaranti eva mṛtyum śruti-paraayaṇaah

(Others, who are unable to gain an insight into the true Self by themselves, approach the knowing preceptors and learn from them the right means to Salvation. By putting into practice their

learning, they cross the sea of the ever-recurring life-and-death process).

But the main thing is :

Mayi eva manah aadhatsva Mayi buddhim niveśaya
Nivaśishyasi Mayi eva atah oordhvam na samśayah

(Fix your mind on Me; keep your intellect ever dwelling in Me, and then undoubtedly would you live in Me).

The ever-merciful Lord offers easier choices :

Atha chittam samaadhaatum na śaknoshi Mayi sthiram
Abhyaasa-yogena tatah Maam iccha aaptum, Dhanamjaya!

(If you cannt at once fix your mind on Me directly, then you may try to reach Me through the steady practice of Yogic concentration).

Abhyaase api asamarthah asi Mat-karma-paramah bhava
Mat-artham api karmaaṇi kurvan siddhim avaapsyasi

(If you are incapable of Yogic concentration, then try doing the works which are dear to Me — such as the service to the poor — , for doing the work of God, which is the seeing to the well-being of all humanity, you can always be sure of attaining the perfection that leads to knowing Me).

Atha etat api aśaktah asi kartum Mat-yogam āśritah
Sarva-karma-phala-tyaagam tatah kuru yata-aatmavaan

(If, however, you cannot do the works that are dear to Me, by keeping your attention solely on Me, all that you have to do is to leave alone the results of your actions in my hands, stopping your mind from running after the external objects.)

By merely taking refuge in God, and letting God judge the results of one's actions, one is always sure to act in the ways of God, and thereby gain Salvation eventually.

The foregoing options were given to the four classes of devotees : the first of the last four verses refers to the noblest type (Uttamottama); the second, to the noble (Uttama); the third, to the mediocre (Madhyama); and the last, to the lowly (Adhama).

How ridiculous it is for the modern prophets to preach the transcendent devotion to each and every one, without first making sure of the type to which the seeker or devotee belongs!

QUALIFICATIONS FOR SELF - KNOWLEDGE

Question : Is there any distinction or proscription concerning the sexes or the castes or the races — as regards their right to pursue God-realisation (to study 'Brahma Vidyaa'), sir ?

Answer : There are of course a few broad differences in the ranks of the devotees. But these distinctions have nothing to do with the physical differences among men and women, but with their mental ones. As long as one is pure at heart, one can learn about God or study the godly scriptures — regardless of the differences of sex or caste or creed.

'Knowledge of God' is universal and none can claim it as his exclusive property.

On the mundane level the differences exist, because the enjoyment of one's life is dependent on the results of one's past actions. Then is it justifiable for the unlucky ones to grudge the lucky ones their joy and luxuries ?

The 'Śiva Geeta' asseverates :

Brahma Kshatra Viśah Śoodraah striyah cha adhikaariṇah
Brahmachaaree gṛhasthah vaa anupaneetah athavaa dwijah

(All the four castes, the women, the bachelors, the householders, and even the boys whose 'upanayanam' — "thread ceremony" — has not been performed can learn about God).

Braahmaṇa-kshatriya-Viśaam stree-śoodraaṇaam cha paavanam
Śaantaye karmaṇaam anyat Yogaat na asti vimuktaye

(There is no better means to liberation from the bondage of works than Yogic meditation — which is meant for all the four castes and for the women as well).

It is well said that only the sick need the physician. Similarly, all those who suffer from the ills of 'samsaara' have to turn to the divine 'physician', God. The study of God or the scripture varies according to the needs of the devotee and to his individual understanding ability. But the right to study anything concerning God is the birthright of each and every human being.

REASONS FOR FAILURE OF YOGIC PRACTICE

Question : We see nowadays some Yogis who give up their good habits, and even their regular practice, after gaining a few miraculous powers. Is their downfall due to their predestined proclivities or is it the way God tests them. sir ?

Answer : There are certain valid reasons for the bad ways into which some Yogis fall, but none of them is due to predestination or the test of God.

The evil ways of the half-baked Yogis have to be attributed to their lack of perfect detachment and devotion. These people do not renounce the world on account of their deep conviction about its impermanence, but they do so only because of a temporary disappointment in life. Once they are unable to put up with the solitary living or the rigorous practices, they go back to the old world of attachments. If the Yogi is really a Yogi he would not want to return to his former bondage, any more than any sane person would want to lick the food he vomited.

Of course there are several obstacles in the pursuit of Yoga. But one can get over them by living in quiet solitude, eating frugal diet and maintaining constant non-dual devotion to God.

Ananyaah chintayantah Maam ye janaah paryupaasate
Teshaam nitya-abhiyuktaanaam Yoga-Kshemam vahaami Aham

(I take care of the acquisition as well as the preservation of the welfare of the individuals who worship Me, thinking of Me alone, as none other than their own Supreme Self.)

Instead of living up to this teaching and getting benefited by the all-encompassing love of the Lord, the Yogis who get a few miraculous powers stop their meditational practice and then go out into the world to seek honours from the populace. When the gullible people — especially the pious women — start falling prostrate at their feet, these pseudo-Yogis begin thinking of themselves as all-knowing men and believe that they can eat and, act as they like.

To see that the Yogis do not fall into such undesirable ways, the ancient sages insisted that they must always live in solitude, observing all the rules and regulations of Yogic simplicity in their daily life.

Ati-aahaarah prayaasah cha prajalpah niyama-grahah
Jana-sangah cha laulyam cha shaḍbhih Yogah vinaśyati

(By giving way to these six things, Yoga becomes fruitless: Overeating; Overstraining in either exercise or in any other external observance; Talkativeness; Preoccupation with worldly regulations; Association with the mob; Falling a prey to temptation).

So said the Hatha Yoga Pradeepikaa.

The Katha Upanishat declares :

Śreyah cha preyah cha manushyam etah
Tau sampareekshya vivinakti dheerah
Śreyah hi dheerah abhi-preyasah vriṇeete
Preyah mandah Yoga-Kashemaat vriṇeete

(To the human being there are two options; the worldly bliss of Preyas, and the otherworldly Bliss of Sreyas. The wise man examines these two values deeply, and prefers Sreyas to Preyas, whereas the moron hankers after the earning — Yoga — and the saving — Kshema — of the earthly wealth).

Vyaadhistyana samśaya pramaadaalasyaavirati bhraanti darśanaa
Labdha bhoomikatvaanavasthi chitta-vikshepaa te antaraayaah

(Disease, inability to stick to Yogic regimen, doubt, error, indolence, uneasiness, illusion, lack of concentration on the goal of the trance-like state, and mental wavering — these are the obstacles to Yogic consummation).

Bhaagavata Puraanam warns :

Streeṇaam stree-sanginaam sangam tyaktvaa dooratah Aatmavaan
Ksheme viviktah aaseenah chintayet Maam atandritah

(Keeping oneself away from women and womanisers, the man seeking Self-knowledge should contemplate God-realisation in a safe and solitary place).

Hatha Yoga Pradeepikaa advises :

Durlabhah vishaya-tyaagah durlabham tattva-darśanam
Durlabhaa sahaja-avasthaa Sat-guroh karuṇaam vinaa

(Without the kindly guidance of a good Guru, the conquest of the sensual impulses, the understanding of true knowledge and the attainment of natural oneness with the Absolute are impossible to achieve).

By merely saying 'Sat-guru', the sacred book is emphasising the fact that it is not the caste but the character that qualifies a good preceptor. As long as the teacher has realised the divine communion, it does not matter whether he or she is married, or unmarried, or whether he or she belongs to this or that section of society.

Rasaayana-kriyaa-vaadah Jyotisham kraya-vikrayam
Vividhaani cha śilpaani varjayet para-daaravat

(The black-magic-like alchemy, mercenary practice of astrology, buying and selling, and similar worldly occupations must be avoided by the seeker after Truth, as he would another man's wife).

I have actually seen with my own eyes the downfall of the Yogis who have taken to medicinal, foretelling and miracle-indulging practices. The function of a Yogi is to reach by means of precept and practice the detachment from material things and the attachment to spiritual quest. There are others who can take care of the other needs of humanity, and the Yogi must not meddle with them.

Samaadhau kriyamaaṇe tu vighnaani aayaanti vai balaat
Anusandhaana-raahityam aalasyam bhoga-laalasam
Layah tamah cha vikshepah rasa-aasvaadah cha śoonyataa
Evam yat vighna-baahulyam tyaajyam tat Brahmavit-janaih

(The seekers after God-consciousness must beware of these hurdles they come across in accomplishing the transcendental trance : absence of strict indentification with the aimed-at goal; lassitude; love of luxury; sleepiness; dullness; mental wandering; hankering after vain joys or false self-identity; and intellectual vacuum).

The greater the aim of any man, the more severe would and should be his dedication and determination in achieving it.

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OPPORTUNE MOMENT TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE

Question : Is it true, sir, that if one attempts at this noble Self-knowledge during boyhood one would be met with too many obstacles, and, consequently, that one should start seeking it only after one is sated with the enjoyment of worldly jojs?

Answer : No, dear friend, the best time to realise God is during boyhood. At that tender age man is free from deceit and cunning.

The tree grows better in a soft soil than in a stony region. In old age men's hearts are hardened by the stresses and strains of life. To say that one should seek self-knowledge after having one's fill of sensual enjoyment is tantamount to saying that one must start digging a well to put out the fire while the house burning.

Moreover, one never knows when one's last moment on earth arrives.

"Na hi pramaanam jantoonaam uttara-kshana-jeevane"

(There is no surety for man against living the next moment).

Mahataa paṇya-paṇena kreetaa iyam kaaya-nauh tvayaa
Paaram duhkha-udadheh gantum tara yaavat na bhidyate

(O man, you bought this boat of your human body after paying a mighty price of virtue to get it. Therefore, before it gets broken and useless, cross the sea of 'samsaara' by putting it to good use while you still have it in good working condition).

Udghaaṭita-nava-dwaare panjare vihagah anilah
Yat tiṣhṭhati tat aaśçharyam prayaaṇe vismayah kutah ?

(It is only strange that the bird of life manages to stay put in the nine-gated mortal cage : there is no need to wonder at its flying away from it).

Besides :

Kṛṣṇa! Tvadeeya pada-pankaja-panjara-antah
adya eva me viśatu maanasa-raajahamsah
Praaṇa-prayaaṇa-samaye kapha-vaata-pittaih
kanṭha-avarodha-vidhau smaraṇam kutah te ?

(O Lord ! may the kindly swan of my mind imbibe the nectar of the lotus of Thy divine feet right now; for, at the time of my departure from this body, afflicted as I will be by the three maladies or cough, cold and liver, and my throat unable to utter aloud Thy scared name, how could I think of Thee ?).

So, my friend, now is always the best time to do any good thing that comes to your mind, for you never know what the next moment will or will not bring.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS ABOUT THE GRIEF OF SENSUALITY

Question : How can one know that the sensual enjoyments are fleeting and distress-causing unless one experiences them in the first place, revered sir ?

Answer : But, dear friend, don't you and can't you see so many others going through the agencies of life ? Do you really have to get yourself burnt to get an idea of the feelings of the other man who is getting burnt ?

"Prakshaalanaat hi pankasya dooraat asparsanam varam"
(It is better not to get into the mud, than to clean it after getting into it wilfully).

Sukham alpam bahu-kleśah vishaya-graahiṇaam nṛṇaam
Anantam Brahma-nishṭhaanaam iti Vedaanta-ḍinḍimah

(There is very little pleasure, and much trouble in getting it, for the people who are after sensuous enjoyment; on the other hand. the joy of God-realisation is unending).

Asatyah sarva samsaarah rasa-aabhaasa-aadi dooshitah
Upekshyah Brahma vijneyam iti Vedaanta-ḍinḍimah

(Unreal is all the worldly existence, full of bitter and inconsequential events. The man of knowledge seeking God should always keep himself away from the earthly attachments).

The last two verses are by Sankaracharya.

So please understand that the pleasures of the senses are akin to that which the locust seeks in the fire.

NO FIXED TIMINGS FOR SALVATION-SEEKERS

Question : Earlier you said that the best time to seek self-knowledge is in boyhood. But what about the people who are well engaged in the quest for liberation during youth or in old age? And what about the boys who fail to gain the end before they suddenly die ? Kindly enlighten me, Sir !

Answer : Dear friend, I only said that boyhood was the most suitable time to seek deliverance. I did not mean that the other periods in man's life are absolutely unfit for that purpose. As I said earlier, it is better to seek any good thing while one has still the innocence and the strength to do it successfully.

Actually, for the sincere seeker there is no fixed period of life to seek God-realisation. At any moment the seeker who realises God becomes one with Him, as the Mundaka Upanishat asserts : "Brahma veda Brahma eva bhavati". The Gita also maintains the same idea : "Sthitvaa asyaam anta-kaale api Brahmanirvaanam richhati" (Staying in this non-dual God-consciousness, man would in the end attain to the Supreme Beatitude of Brahman).

Just as a man. who had all along been poor, but towards the end of his life might win a lottery and become rich, so also might a man find the darkness of ignorance in his heart dispelled by the dawn of knowledge when he sees the truth of God through the aid of a good teacher or the grace of God.

As regards your query about the man who dies before completing his Yogic practice till its fruition, such a person, if desirous of heavenly pleasures, would go to heaven after death. Then, after getting tired of those no less transitory joys of heaven, would get back to earth, by taking birth in a pious family, and would complete his Yogic practice till he attains liberation through knowledge.

That is to say, once a man gets some understanding of the real nature of Brahman, that knowledge, albeit incomplete, is never lost. At the same time, the family into which the Yogi is

reborn to complete his former attempt at the life of knowledge, cannot claim to have all its members equally virtuous as he. The crow and the cuckoo look alike, but when it is spring the difference is easy to pick out, when the cuckoo sings beautifully and the crow's crowing is as harsh as ever.

So, the reborn Yogi, dissatisfied with the worldly ways of the rest of his family, would go into solitary retirement and finish his search for knowledge.

Lord Krishna conveyed as much to Arjuna :

Paartha, na eva iha na amutra vinaaśah tasya vidyate
Na hi kalyaaṇa-kṛt kaśchit durgatim, taata, gacchati

(Dear Arjuna, remember that neither in this world nor in the other the man who has begun his Yogic practice well and achieved some good work, would find himself following evil ways or losing the good effects of his worthy deeds).

Praapya puṇya-kṛtaam lokaan ushitvaa śaaśvateeh samaah ,
Śucheenaam śreemataam gehe Yoga-bhrashṭah abhijaayate

(The man who dies without completing his well-begun Yogic meditation would be reborn into a pure and noble home, after sojourning for long years in the regions of the blessed).

Tatra tam buddhi-samyogam labhate paurva-daihikam
Yatate cha tatah bhooyah samsiddhau, Kurunandana

(In that noble home he would get the sort of birth that accords with the good work done in his previous existence, and once again he successfully attempts at God-realisation which is his due).

Poorva-abhyaasena tena eva hriyate hi avaśah api sah
Jijnaasuh api Yogasya Śabda-Brahmaa ativartate

(By virtue of the practice of the former birth, he can easily check his mind from wandering into sensual traps; thus even the

knower of Yogic communion transcends the mere material value of performing Vedic rites, and attains to the Absolute).

When it is allowed that even the wish to know about Yogic communion has such great effect, need it be emphasised that the real sincere practice yields instantaneous results in the search for Truth and God ?

So, beloved devotees, even if you do not yet have the time and the means to concentrate on Yogic meditation, the least you can do is to keep alive the wish for its pursuit in your minds — so that eventually you can get the fruits of that knowledge without fail.

HEAVEN & HELL

Question : It is said that man enjoys the fruits of his actions either in Heaven or in Hell, depending on their nature. If so, in this world there should be no differences among the good and the bad people. Thus it is hard to believe in the existence of Heaven and Hell. Is it right, sir ?

Answer : No, friend. You must not speak like that. Our sages would never misguide us, because they have intuitive knowledge of the three worlds — earth, hell and heaven.

The fact is that one does not suffer or enjoy the results of one's action completely in hell or heaven. Only a part of the effects are gone through in the other world; after that sojourn is over, the individual is again born on earth to suffer or enjoy the residue.

The only difference is, those who have to enjoy the heavenly residue take a noble birth on earth, whereas those who have to suffer the residue of the evil effects are born into lowly families. This residual effect is called "karma sesha".

Now, the question may arise as to why all the sin or all the virtue should not get its complete effects in hell or heaven. The '*leelaa*' of God is to let man experience the duality of good and evil, in order to ascertain for themselves the contrast that is behind the process of creation. If all men are created equal. from the human standpoint (for, in the eyes of God all men are, no doubt, equal), then they would have no fear of hell or no hope of heaven, and would act with supreme indifference to their actions.

There is also a worldly example. In olden days the kings used to mete out punishment to the sinners in public places, so that others could be duly warned about the fate that awaits them if they were to sin, and if the citizen were virtuous, he would be publicly honoured and rewarded with a good job.

The sacred books also supply the authority :

"Rauravam narakam gatvaa, chanḍaaleshu api jaayate"

(Going to hell, the sinner comes back to the earth to be born in the home of an outcaste).

On the other hand, the virtuous person is reborn in a noble abode, as illustrated by the following verse :

Praapya puṇya-kṛtaam lokaan ushitvaa śaaśvateeh samaah
*Śucheenaam śreemataam gehe Yoga-bhrashṭāh abhijaayate**

* Translated earlier

Question : It is understandable that the three facets of Fate should have their respective remedies. However, while we understand that the 'praarabdha' (the predestination which affects the present birth) is extinguished by its being now experienced, and that the 'sanchita' (the destiny accumulated all along) is destroyed by God-knowledge, how is it possible to ward off the future effects of the 'aagaami', for the seekers, some of whom are engaged in the quest for Brahman and some others in penance ?

Answer : The destruction of the three aspects of Karma (Destiny) is said of the 'Jeevanmukta's (the men who attain Liberation even while alive), but not of the ordinary men. And among the 'Jeevanmuktas' only a very few still indulge in penance. The others just watch their overt actions like godly witnesses.

All the same, even those who take to penance have no ulterior motive. That little wish to indulge in penance — without all the time remaining in self-awareness — may be said to be part of their 'praarabdha'.

When it is said that Knowledge is the result of the penance and meditation performed during many past births, one can say that, if such practices are adopted by the 'Jeevanmukta', they are just the remnants of 'sanchita' which find their extinction in that manner.

Be that as it may, let it be reiterated that at the dawn of Knowledge all the workings of Fate are completely gone for ever. The distinction of Fateful action or the result of Action or the person who acts in accordance with his Fate does not exist in the state of God-consciousness: all such distinctions belong to the realm of nescient illusion *(Bhrama)*. The man of knowledge is like the dreamer who ceases to be afraid of the nightmare once he is awake. Awakened knowledge, in the 'acting' realiser, is comparable to the piece of paper that retains its shape after getting burnt. Just as the burnt paper is no longer useful for writing

purposes, so also does not the active aspect of predestined Fate have any effect on the 'Jeevanmukta'.

Prāarabdham bhogatah naśyet tattva-jnaanena sanchitam
Aagaamī dwi-vidham proktam tat dweshi-priya-vaadinoh

(The predestined effects of this birth cease to exist when they are experienced now; the accumulated effects of Destiny are dispelled by the light of knowledge; and the two kinds of future destiny, as the result of present thoughts and present actions, are exhausted by the external reactions of friendship and hatred to which one is liable), says "Siva Tattva-jnaanam".

"Aparoksha-anubhooti" adds :

Tattva-jnaana-udayaat oordhvam praarabdham na eva vidyate
Dehaadeenaam asattvaat tu yathaa swapnah nibodhatah

(Just as the things seen in the dream do not exist to the awakened dreamer, so also do not the effects of the pre-destined 'praarabdha' bother the man who attains self-knowledge).

Karma janma-antareeyam yat praārabdham iti keertitam
Tat tu janma-antara-abhaavaat pumsah na eva asti karhichit

(Inasmuch as there is no future birth to the man of Knowledge, that Destiny which is called 'praarabdha' — the effects which have to be gone through from the beginning of the present existence — has no effect on him).

MALE OFFSPRING NO 'MUST' FOR LIBERATION

Question : Following the dictum, "aputrasya gatih na asti' — there is no future way of salvation to the one who has no son — many parents without male offspring are going through countless hardships by performing harsh rites and believing in quacks. What is the real meaning of this dictum, sir ?

Answer : The dictum quoted by you does not apply to each and every one. It was meant for the kingly householders of yore.

The tradition then was that the kings, when they retire to the forest to perform penance, should see their princes and instruct them in the discharge of the latter's duties as would-be kings. To such kings a son is the one who ensures the future safety — as the term 'gatih' really means in this context — of the State. Therefore the sacred code so opined.

That apart, the dictum is related to 'Karma Kaanda' (the way of action) and has no bearing upon 'Jnaana Kaanda (the way of knowledge).

Indeed, if having a son is a prerequisite to Salvation, all the great sages and seers, who were bachelors, would have been unfit for Salvation !

Besides, how can having a male child help the parent in certain matters like his own physical well-being ? It the father is sick, it does not help him if his son takes the medicine. So, in order to be cured of the disease of 'samsaara', everyone has to find out the right kind of spiritual medicine that suits him or her best.

If the parents in their former births had male offspring, and were therefore entitled to Salvation, how is it we see so many parents now — of whom it cannot be said that all of them have had no sons in their countless previous existences ?

Again, if the birth of a good son promises the father a future residence in Heaven, would not the father, who has a bad son, by the same token, have to go to hell ? Is the son who is entitled to the wealth of the father also not responsible to honour the latter's debts ? If by merely having a son, one gets to heaven or attains liberation, even a wicked man may have such chances.

Of course, the 'Pitri-karma' (funeral rites performed on behalf of the dead father) are concerned with the purgatory of "preta loka" (the world of the dead). The virtuous people have no need to pass through purgatory; they go to heaven directly.

The idea of having a son is merely a worldly one — of having someone to look after one when one is disabled in old age.

No one else can save oneself except oneself in the ultimate analysis :

Avaśyam anubhoktavyam kṛtam karma śubha-aśubham

(There is no escaping the experiencing of the results of one's actions — good as well as bad).

The Gita avers :

Oordhvam gacchanti Sattvasthaah madhye tishṭhanti Raajasaah
Jaghanya-guṇa-vrittisthaah adhah gacchanti Taamasaah

(The Saattvika-natured people go to the Elysian regions; the Raajasika-minded persons stay on in the earthly realms; and the Taamasika-witted lowly individuals go to hellish resorts).

'Viveka Choodaamani' opines :

Ṛṇa-mochana-kartaarah pituh santi suta-aadayah
Bandha-mochana-kartaa tu swa-aatmanah anyah na kaśchana

(One's children and others may pay back one's debts after one's death, but as far as one's own deliverance from the bonds of 'samsaara' is concerned none but oneself can help oneself).

Mastaka-nyasta-bhaara-aadeh duhkham anyaih nivaaryate
Kshudha-aadi duhkham tu vinaa swena kenachit

(One might seek others' help to relieve oneself of the material burden placed on one's head; but one can never, except by one's own resources, free oneself from the distress caused by hunger and the like).

That is, even one's own son cannot help one in freeing oneself from the sorrows of body or mind or soul.

Hence the real, figurative, symbolic connotation of the quoted dictum is that one should acquire the 'wife or husband of Knowledge' in order to beget the 'son of Salvation', or that in the inter-play of the individual self and the Universal Self in Yogic communion one brings forth the 'son of God-consciousness'.

Actually, good sons are to be seen rarely nowadays, even if they are capable of freeing their parents from the worldly fetters. But again and again the sages like Sankaraachaarya remind us, through their books like the same *Viveka Choodaamani :*

Avidyaa-kaama-karma-aadi paaśa-bandham vimochitum
Kah śaknuyaat vinaa aatmaanam kalpa-koṭi-śataih api ?

(Even in the course of a billion centuries, none but one by oneself can release oneself from the noose of the desire-driven actions prompted by Nescience).

All this is not to deny the need for the 'sraaddha karma' of offering oblation to the departed forefathers. The obsequies have their special purpose, and the departed souls offer some sort of benefit to the surviving heirs in an extra-sensory manner.

At the same time, the *Self* alone can save the *self* — neither son nor daughter nor any other self.

DANGERS OF SENSUAL CRAVINGS

Question : A popular Telugu verse has it : "Kaami gaani vaadu Mokshakaami gaadu" (He who does not crave mundane pleasure is not fit to be a seeker of Salvation). Accordingly, some Raaja Yogis are leading astray the seekers, who have a sincere interest in detachment, by telling them that their sensual cravings are basically needed. Do you agree with such "Raaja Yogis" sir ?

Answer : Again, my friend, the self-seeking Gurus have misinterpreted a worthy saying. The word 'Kaama' means not only 'lust' but also 'wish'. Here the idea is that unless the seeker wishes for Liberation with intense determination he cannot attain his goal. Just as a satyr would take immense trouble to get the woman he loves passionately, so also should the seeker of the 'woman of liberation' try for it with intense passion.

The Lord has categorically denied Salvation to the lovers of the sensual pleasures :

Aapooryamaaṇam achala-pratishṭham
samudram aapah praviśanti yadvat
Tadvat kaamaah yam praviśanti sarve
sah śaantim aapnoti na kaama-kaamee

(Only he in whom all sensual cravings are completely submerged, like the waters in the deep, ever-steady sea, would attain the supreme peace — not he who hankers after the physical pleasures).

How undesirable is desire is again described :

Kaamah eshah krodhah eshah Rajo-guṇa-samudbhavah
Mahaaśanah mahaa-paapmaa viddhi enam iha vairiṇam

(Know this as the product of the mode of desire — the thing that makes a man sin in spite of himself —, this lust, this wrath, which is man's worst enemy, and which is all-devouring and all-sinful).

Tri-vidham Narakasya idam dwaaram naaśanam aatmanah
Kaamah krodhah tathaa lobhah tasmaat etat trayam tyajet

(There are three gates to Hell : lust, anger and greed. So these three must be relinquished).

The Katha and the Brihadaaranyaka Upanishads say :

Yadaa sarve pramuchyante kaamaah ye asya hṛdi śritaah
Atha martyah amṛtah bhavati atra Brahma samaśnute

(When all the desires in the heart of man leave him, the mortal becomes immortal, and he realises God here and now).

So, you see, nowhere is 'desire' justified by the seers or the sacred books.

You must always beware of the wrong and literal interpreters of certain symbolic verses :

Go-maamsam bhakshayet nityam pibet amara-vaaruṇeem
Kuleenam tam aham manye itare kula-ghaatakāh

Literally, this would mean : "I consider only that man who always eats beef and drinks toddy as the noble-born one; the others are traitors to their families".

But the real connotation is : "When the seeker unites the 'tongue-end, vital breath and mind' — as the term "go-maamsa-bhakshanam" signifies — there flows within him the nectar of immortality; only such Yogis are worthy; the rest are failures".

See what the authoritative text declares :

Vishasya vishayaaṇaam cha dooram atyantam aantaram
Upabhujya visham hanti vishayaah smaraṇaat api

(There is a lot of difference between the real poison and the poison of sensual passion : the former kills one only if it is

imbibed, whereas the latter kills one, spiritually, even by the mere thought of it).

The point is that while the intercourse between man and woman is essential for the propagation of the species, the very result of birth that ensues thereby causing infinite troubles in earthly life, the sage must avoid any possibility of rebirth, by avoiding the mere sight of a woman. Although 'woman' is specified, the word includes 'man' in the case of women who seek salvation.

The seeker (with the preceding explanation in mind, reading 'man' where women-seekers are concerned) must further note :

Maamsa-paañchaalikaayaah tu yantra-lole anga-panjare
Snaayu-asthi-granthi-śaalinyah striyah kim iva śobhanam

(What sort of lasting joy can you derive from the machine-like cage of the feminine body which is just an amalgam of flesh, bones and joints) ?

Keśa-kajjala-dhaariṇyah dussparśaah lochana-priyaah
Dushkṛta-agni-śikhaah naaryah dahanti tṛṇavat naraan

(Women, who are merely nice to look at but harmful to touch, are like the fire of evil that burns men like mere grass).

Dhaatu-baddham mahaa-rogam paapa-mandiram adhruvam
Vikaara-aakaara-visteerṇam spṛshṭvaa snaanam vidheeyate

(Indeed one must take a purificatory bath after touching the disease-causing, sin-provoking body of a woman, the home of evil).

So maintain the sacred texts, after gaining the supreme understanding of human life and its noble purpose. If everyone

were to seek the propagation of the species, the species, by that sort of indiscrimination, would become degenerated.

Hence there must be some people who sublimate their sensual desire into the spiritual love of God and show the rest of humanity the way to Salvation. It was with this intention that the seers looked down upon women, not that they had any disregard for women as a sex.

At all events, desire for its own sake leads to destruction — even the men who profess to be "Raaja Yogi"s.

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CHARACTERISTICS OF A JEEVANMUKTA

Question : Will you kindly enlighten me on the nature of the man who attains Liberation even while alive ?

Answer : Dear friend, it is not easy to describe the Jeevanmukta.

As in the case of ordinary mortals, even among the realised souls there are different types of men. Their characteristics also vary.

In point of fact, the real Jeevanmukta has no materially specific 'character', because he is one with the attributeless Absolute. The only people with visible characteristics are the men still bound by the three modes, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. You might even describe the nature of the Trinity — Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva — but not of the 'Jeevanmukta'.

The Jeevanmuktas are like the fire, the sun, and the air, which do not distinguish between one entity and another on which they exercise their power. The only thing that distinguishes them is their being unaffected by the worldly characteristics.

Yathaa parvatam aadeeptam na aaśrayanti mṛga-dwijaah
Tadvat Brahma-vidah doshaah na aaśrayanti kadaachana

(Like the burning mountain, which is shunned by the beasts and the birds, the earthly evils do not touch the men of God-knowledge).

In whatever state of life, or station of life, or stage of life, these God-knowing men move, or whatever different outward habits they have, all of them have some specifically common spiritual qualities like these :

1. Although outwardly the daily life of the average man and of the realised soul, as regards eating and sleeping, might look alike, in respect of the inward qualities both differ very much.

Where the ordinary man lets his passions and prejudices guide him without much resistance, the Jeevanmukta's pure heart rises above them.

2. Where the householders take pleasure in their physical relations, the realised souls delight in the life of the spirit.

3. While the common man always keeps doing something or other to derive personal profit, the Jeevanmukta never starts doing any mundane thing — except for the benefit of the rest of humanity.

4. Unlike the ignoramus, the realised souls share the distress of the others and try to help such distressed people.

5. They have nothing to crave or none to hate.

6. They do their best to fulfil the wishes of those that seek their advice or assistance.

7. They are by nature compassionate.

8, They look upon others as they do themselves.

10. They disregard their own pain to secure others' pleasure

Such noble qualities prevail among great men of all time and of all climes.

You may refer to the Gita to know more about the 'Sthitaprajna' (the man who identifies himself with the Absolute and is therefore unmoved by the worldly pain or pleasure).

I shall quote some verses from 'Viveka Choodaamani' for further clarificaiton :

Digambarah vaa api cha saambarah vaa
Tvagambarah vaa api chidambarasthah
Unmattavat vaa api cha baalavat vaa
Piṡaachavat vaa vicharati avanyaam

(The man who realised his real Self would go about in any outward manner — all the time perfectly steadfast in his inward self-realisation—, either naked or well-clad, or clothed in leather or in pure consciousness, or behaving like a mad man or a child or like one possessed by a spirit).

Kwachit mooḍhah kwachit api mahaa-raaja-vibhavah
Kwachit bhraantah saumyah kwachit ajagara-aachaara-kalitah
Kwachit paatree-bhootah kwachit avamatah kwa api aviditah
Charati evam praajnah satata-parama-aananda-sukhitah

(Blessed as he is with the divine happiness of self–realisation, the man of knowledge, unaware of his physical self, moves about at times as a dunce, at times as a king, at times as one confused, at times as a man at peace with himself, at times unmoving like a giant mountain-snake, at times as a man of honour, at times as someone dishonoured, and at times incognito).

Chintaa-ṡoonyam adainya-bhaiksham aṡanam paanam sarit-vaarishu
Swaatantryeṇa nirankuṡaa sthitih abheeh nidraa smaṡaane vane
Vastram-kshaalaṇa-ṡoshaṇa-aadi-rahitam dik vaa astu ṡayyaa mahee
Sanchaarah nigama-anta-veethishu vidaam kriḍaa Pare Brahmaṇi

(The man who finds his bliss in realising the Supreme Brahman is indifferent to the normal ways of living : he is free from worry, sustains himself with the food offered by the pious but unsought by himself; he relies on the waters of the moving streams for his main sustenance; he moves about fearlessly, as though he were lord of himself and servant of none; he sleeps either in the jungles or in the cemeteries; he is either naked or clad in unkempt rags; he sleeps on the bare floor or open ground; and his genuine movements are ever in the realm of supreme metaphysics).

Kshudham deha-vyathaam tyaktvaa baalah kreeḍati vastuni
Tathaa eva vidwaan ramate nirmalah niraham sukhee

(Like a child who plays with his toys, forgetful of hunger or personal comfort, the man of wisdom is ever happy on account of unselfish unconcern about 'I' and 'mine').

Na asti nirvaasanaat maunaat param sukha-krit uttamam
Vijnaana-aatma-swaroopasya swa-aananda-rasa-paayinah

(To the man who takes pleasure in imbibing the nectar of God-knowledge there is nothing more delightful than the silence enjoyed in the state of freedom from the sensual impluse.)

The 'Jeevanmukta Geeta' defines the 'Jeevanmukta' thus :

Karmendriya-parityaagee dhyaanaavarjita chetanah
Aatma-jnaanee tathaa eva ekah Jeevat-muktah sah uchyate

(He is a Jeevanmukta, who relinquishes the lures of the sense-organs and subdues the mind in meditation).

Garbha-dhyaanena paśyanti jnaaninaam mànah uchyate
"So'ham" manah vileeyante 'jeevanmuktah' sah uchyate

(When through the internal contemplation of the Spirit the mind of man is awake to the supramental realisation of 'I am none but he, the God,' then such a realiser is called a 'Jeevanmukta').

Ekaakee ramate nityam swabhaava-guṇa-varjitah
Brahma-jnaana-rasa-aaswaadee Jeevanmuktah sah uchyate

(He who finds his supreme joy in solitude, released from the modal nature of nescience, and intent solely on imbibing the essence of self-knowledge, is called a 'Jeevanmukta').

'Jnaana Vaasishtham' defines :

Harsha amarsha bhaya krodha kaama kaarpaṇya dṛshṭibhih
Na paraamarśyate yah antah sah jeevanmuktah iti uchyate

(He whose mind is untouched by excessive joy or envy or fear or anger or lust or pettiness is indeed a Jeevanmukta).

The scriptures say :

Ateeta-anusandhaanam bhavişyat-avichaaraṇam
Audaaseenyam api praaptam Jeevanmuktasya lakshaṇam

(The Jeevanmukta does nor rejoice or grieve over what is past; does not eagerly look forward to future events; and accepts whatever the present moment brings him, with good grace).

Indeed, my friend, that family is blessed in which such a great soul is born.

—

HOLY FAMILY OF THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE

Dhanyaa maataa pitaa dhanyah gotram dhanyam kula-udbhavah
Dhanyaa cha vasudhaa, Devi !, yatra syaat Guru-bhaktataa

(Wherever there are disciples who have unquestioning faith in God and in their Guru, their parents, their clan, their land itself is thrice blessed).

So says the 'Guru Geetaa'.

The 'Sannyaasa Saara' declares :

Shashṭim kulaani ateetaani shashṭim aagaamikaani cha
Kulaani uddharate praajnah sannyastam iti yah vadet

(The moment a man of wisdom declares that he is renouncing the world, his kin of sixty generations before and after him would be saved).

Nṛtyanti pitarah sarve santushṭaah tasya vamśajaah
Devaah cha ṛshayah tṛptaah prayaanti paramam padam

(Whenever a true devotee finds God, his forefathers dance with pleasure, his clan will be delighted, and the gods and the sages will be contented — all of whom will realise Beatitude along with him).

So maintains 'Varaaha Puraana'.

Teerthee kurvanti teerthaani su-karmee kurvanti karmaaṇi
Sat-śaastree kurvanti śaastraaṇi

(Wherever the true devotees thrive, the slums become places of pilgrimage; the worldly works change into noble deeds, and the ordinary sciences become sacred texts).

Modante pitarah nṛtyanti devataah
Sa-naathaa cha evam bhooh bhavati

(Seeing a genuine devotee the ancestors are delighted, the gods dance with joy, and the earth itself feels that she is highly well-protected).

—

BLISS OF THE MAN OF KNOWLEDGE

Verily none can describe the ecstasy of the realised soul.

Na tat sukham Surendrasya na sukham chakravartinaam
Yat sukham veeta-raagasya muneh ekaanta-vaasinah

(Neither the Lord of hosts, Indra, nor the Emperor of the whole world can claim the like of blissful joy which the world-renouncing sage, living in solitude, experiences).

Rasam Brahma pibet yah cha tṛptah yah Paramaatmani
Indram cha manyate rankam nṛpaaṇaam tatra kaa kathaa

(He who imbibes the ambrosial knowledge of God and is completely contented with his abode in the Absolute, looks down upon Indra himself as a menial : it goes without saying, therefore, that the emperors of the world are no match for him).

Na atah sukha-taram kinchit trishu lokeshu vidyate
Veeta-tṛshṇasya kaamebhyah mukta-sangasya yat sukham

(There is no joy in all the three worlds which is comparable to that of the man who is free from greed and desires).

The foregoing verses are from 'Siva-tattva-jnaanam'

The 'Skanda Upanishat' adds :

Na nijam nijavat bhaati antahkaraṇa-jrimbhaṇaat
Antahkaraṇa-naaśena samvit-maatra-sthitah Harih

(Because of the false effect of the ego the truth about oneself does not truthfully dawn on one; but if the ego is destroyed in the knowledge of God, the knower becomes one with the Known, i. e., God).

Jeevah Śivah Śivah jeevah na jeevah kevalah Sivah
Tusheṇa baddhah vreehih syaat tusha-abhaavena taṇḍulah

(Man is spiritually one with God; God is one with man, in His immanent aspect — even as the paddy grain, with its chaff removed, becomes pure grain, so too does the man who is freed from the bonds of action become one with God).

The scriptures say :

Sarva-saakshiṇam Aatmaanam Varṇa-Aaśrama-vivarjitam
Brahma-roopatayaa paśyan Brahmaa eva bhavati swayam

(He who sees the attributeless God as the all-witnessing Universal Self, untouched by the divisions of wordly social orders and classifications, would become one with the same all-seeing Self).

SIGHT OF HOLY MEN BEGETS PIETY

The scripture asserts :

Chit-ekatva-parijnaane na śochati na muhyati
Advaitam parama-aanandam Śivam yaati tu kevalam

(The seeker who is self-identifyingly aware of the Supreme consciousness has no need to worry or to delude himself : he actually attains to that ever-blissful, non-dual Universal Self).

Durlabhah maanushah dehah praaṇinaam kshaṇa-bhangurah
Tatra api durlabham manye Vaikuṇṭha-priya-darśanam

(Among the myriad mortal creatures, the birth of a human being is rare; rarer still is the chance of becoming or seeing a true devotee of God).

Says Lord Krishna in Bhaagavatam :

Yah snaati śeeta-tarayaa Saadhu-sangati-Gangayaa
Kim tasya daanaih kim teerthaih kim tapobhih kim adhvaraih ?

(What use has the man, who bathes in the blissful waters of the river of the association with holy men, for almsgiving or taking a dip in sacred rivers or doing penance or performing sacrificial rites ?).

Śoonyam aapoornataam eti mṛtyuh api amṛtaayate
Aapat sampat iva aabhaati vidvat-jana-samaagamaat

(By associating oneself with the wise men, who have identified themselves with God, one finds emptiness well filled; death changed into everlasting life; and danger turned into good fortune).

The last two verses were from 'Vaasishtham'.

Gangaa paapam śaśee taapam dainyam Kalpa-taruh tathaa
Paapam taapam dainyam cha eva hanti sat-jana-darsanam

(The sacred river Ganga washes away sins; the moon drives away physical pain; the all-yielding heavenly tree, Kalpa-taru, banishes poverty : but the sight of holy men inspires the search for the salvation which removes all the three — sin, pain and poverty).

—

CRITIQUE OF MEDITATION

Question : In order to see that this meditation bears fruit, revered sir, what is the best posture, the best place and the best direction to face (east or west, north or south)?

Answer : All these external facts are intended for the mediocre seekers. The real means to self-knowledge is simply soulful introspection, in which transcendental process there is no question of time or place, posture or direction.

However, since 'niyama' (regulation) is essential for 'nishtha' (concentration), I shall quote the authoritative texts in this connection.

Lord Krishna advises :

Śuchau deśe pratishthaapya sthiram aasanam aatmanah
Na ati-ucchritam na ati-neecham chaila ajina-kuśa-uttaram

(The meditator should be firmly seated in a clean spot, on a seat, placed neither too high nor too low, and covered with holy grass, deerskin and cloth one upon another).

Tatra ekaagram manah kritvaa yata-chitta-indriya-kriyah
Upaviśya aasane yunjyaat Yogam aatma-viśuddhaye

(There, concentrating his attention on yogic communion, and controlling his consciousness, senses and actions, he should practise Yoga for the sake of self-purification).

Samam kaaya-śiro-greevam dhaarayan achalam sthirah
Samprekshya naasikaagram swam diśah cha anavalokayan

(Holding his trunk, head and neck erect, remaining still, and without letting his eyes wander hither and thither, he must fix his gaze on the tip of his nose).

The 'Siva Geeta' has this to say :

Śiva-devaalaye goshṭhe sarva-devaalaye śubhe
Vaṭasya dhaatryaa moole vaa maṭhe bṛndaavane tathaa
Pavitre nirmale deśe nitya-anusṭhaanataḥ api vaa
Nirvedanena maunena japam etat samaarabhet

(The man of regular Yogic practice must start his silent meditation in the temple of Lord Shiva or in any other sacred shrine; or under a banyan tree; or in a monastery; or in a pleasure garden — all the time keeping his mind free from worry and remaining silent).

Udanmukhaḥ śaanti-jaapye vaśye poorva-mukhaḥ tathaa
Yaame tu maaraṇam proktam paśchime cha dhana-aagamaḥ

(The worshipper for peace must face the north; the one who wants to bring another person or thing under his spell, the east; the one intending the killing of an enemy, the south; and the one seeking wealth, the west).

Yaḥ tu bilva-vane nityam kuṭeem kritvaa vaset naraḥ
Sarve mantraaḥ prasidhyanti japa-maatreṇa kevalam

(To him who builds his hermitage in a 'bilva' garden, all his wishes would be fulfilled by his mere prayer).

As for the posture, the most suitable and desirable are 'siddha' and 'padma' *aasanas.*

Chatuḥ-aśeeṭi-peeṭheshu siddham eva sadaa abhyaset
Dwaa-saptati-sahasraaṇaam naaḍeenaam mala-śodhanam

(From among the eighty-four postures, one must always choose the 'siddha-aasana', because in that position all the seventy-two thousand veins and arteries of the body are well regulated).

This is how the 'siddha' posture has to be practised :

Yoni-sthaanakam anghri-moola-ghaṭitam kṛtvaa dṛḍham vinyaset
Meḍhre paadam atha ekam eva hṛdaye kṛtvaa hanum susthiram
Sthaaṇuḥ samyamita-indriyaḥ achala-driśaa paśyet bhruvoḥ-antaram
Hi etat moksha-kavaaṭa-bheda-janakam Siddha-aasanam prochyate

(This posture that opens the door to salvation has to be assumed with undiverted attention, with the senses controlled, and keeping the sight fixed between the eyebrows, in this manner : the left foot must be pressed against the region between the anus and the generative organ, with the other foot pressed against the generative organ and with the chin pressed down on to the chest).

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ON CHANGING THE GURU

Question : Sir, if one's present Guru cannot teach all that one should learn, or if the Guru is in a trance or on a visit to another place or does not live up to one's expectations, may one turn to another Guru ? If so, would one be guilty of being traitorous to the Guru ?

Answer : Surely the aim of approaching a Guru is to attain perfect knowledge. If by any chance such an aim is not fulfilled under the supervision of one teacher, one can certainly seek another. For, the main thing is the acquisition of knowledge, not the individual teacher. At the same time, one must not lose one's respect for the former teacher or speak ill of him.

If the Guru feels that he is not able to impart all the knowledge which his disciple seeks, it is his duty to send the pupil to another preceptor. It is like the general practitioner's habit of referring to a specialist the patient whom he is unable to cure completely.

Here is a case in point. Sage Vyaasa was the first preceptor of his son Suka; when Vyaasa saw that he could not dispel all the doubts of his son, he himself sent Suka to king Janaka to seek enlightenment -- although Vyaasa was an incarnation of Vishnu and a Brahmarshi (a sage who was born as a Brahmin), and Janaka was a householder and belonged to the next caste by birth. When such a great sage did not stand on ceremony, the lesser preceptor must not think of his false prestige when he cannot educate his pupil properly, but must of his own accord send the disciple to seek enlightenment elsewhere.

If any doubts of the disciple are not cleared by the present Guru, he should not hesitate to approach another one, for the Gita warns us that he who is beset by doubt is spiritually destroyed (samsaya-aatmaa vinasyati).

The Guru-geetaa also tells us :

Madhu-lubdhah yathaa bhŗngah pushpaat pushpa-antaram vrajet

Jnaana-lubdhah śishyah Guroh Guru-anataram vrajet

(Just as the bee in search of honey goes from one flower to another, the seeker after knowledge must learn all that he wants to, by approaching one teacher after another).

Of course, the changing of teachers must never be motivated by the mere craze for variety, but only by absolute necessity.

NON-DIFFERENCE BETWEEN VISHNU AND SHIVA

Question : Some Vaishnavaites maintain that if ever they pray to, or visit the temple of, any deity other than Vishnu, they would be committing the same sin as that of a housewife who is guilty of adultery. The 'Veera Shaivites' also feel similarly about worshipping any deity but Shiva. Do you agree with such partisan attitudes, revered sir ?

Answer : My friend, there can no worse illustration of ignorance than this. The only reason for this sort of intolerance is the wish of the protagonists of individual creeds to keep their followers within their particular fold. The scriptures and the other sacred books say again and again that God is one, but that He may be worshipped in different names and forms, merely to suit the taste and convenience of the worshipper — with the proviso that these different names and forms do not affect the singleness of God.

You call 'water' by different names in different languages, but does the nature of water change according to the changes in the linguistic expression ?

If the various creeds sincerely and really strive for the final goal, they would find their destination in one and the same God.

You go to Tirupati, from Varanasi in the southerly direction, from Rameswaram in the northerly direction, from Madras in the westerly direction, and from Mysore in the easterly direction. To say that Tirupati could not be reached by any direction other than the one which is taken by the residents of the different regions would mean the same thing as what you just said about the Vaishnavites and the Veera-Shaivaites.

Likewise, we may imagine the same divine incarnation in Raama at Ayodhya, in Krishna at Brindaavan, in Buddha at Kapilavastu, in Jesus Christ at Jerusalem, in Mahammed at Mecca, in Sankara of Kerala, in Ramanuja of Tamil Nadu, in Madhva of Karnataka and in Nanak of Punjab.

We may also take the example of the dramatic player who remains the same individual, no matter he plays different roles on the stage in different plays. The audiences react differently to the same person in different roles. God also appears to be different in the different climes and at different times. Where the wise men know the truth of this, the ignoramuses quarrel among themselves, unaware of it. That is why on one occasion Swami Vivekananda said that the dogs are wiser than men: whereas the dogs recognise their masters even when they appear in various garbs, the men do not see the same God in His multitudinous manifestations :

Ekah Naaraayaṇah na dwiteeyah asti kaśchit
Ekah eva Śivah nityah tatah anyat sakalam mṛshaa
Bahunaa atra kim uktena sarvam Brahma-mayam jagat
Aneka-bheda-bhinnah tu kreeḍate Parameśwarah

(There is only one God : He appears as Vishnu or Shiva or Brahma in accordance with the particular function He has to perform and the particular forms in which He is imagined by His devotees).

Ekah vaśee sarva-bhoota-antara-aatmaa
Ekam roopam bahudhaa yah karoti
Tam aatmastham ye anupaśyanti dheeraah
Teshaam sukham śaaśvatam na itareshaam

(The One Formless Lord of all creation who manifests Himself in multitudinous forms, in association with His creative principle of Maayaa, is understood by the wise men as their own indwelling eternal spirit: consequently, they enjoy perpetual bliss — which is denied to those that do not see Him within themselves).

The Gita has the same idea :

Eeśwarah sarva-bhootaanaam hrit-deśe, Arjuna, tishṭhati
Bhraamayan sarva-bhootaani yantra-aarooḍhaani Maayayaa

(The Lord God is immanent in the heartland of creatures, causing their movements by the driving power of the machine-like 'Maayaa').

The Upanishads add :

Satyena labhyah tapasaa hi eshah Aatmaa
Samyak jnaanena brahmacharyeṇa nityam
Antah-śareere jyotirmayah hi śubhrah
Yam paśyanti yatayah ksheeṇa-doshaah

(The sages, who are freed from all sins, see in their heart of hearts the ever-effulgent, ever-pure Supreme Self, which can be realised only through the regular pursuit of truth, penance, true knowledge and celibacy).

Eshah sarveshu bhootesh gooḍhah Aatmaa na prakaaśate
Dṛśyate tu agryayaa buddhyaa sookshmayaa sookshma-darśibhih

(This Supreme Self which is transcendentally hidden in all living creatures cannot be seen by the physical eye, but is perceived by the subtle intellects which see it by means of their intuitive clairvoyance).

Bhidyate hṛdaya-granthih chhidyante sarva-samśayaah
Ksheeyante cha asya karmaaṇi Tasmin dṛshṭe Paraavare

(As soon as the seeker spiritually sights the transcendent Spirit, all the doubts binding his heartstrings would be dispelled and he will no longer be enslaved by his worldly actions).

Avidyaayaam antatre vartamaanaah
Swayam dheeraah paṇḍitam manyamaanaah
Janghanyamaanaah pariyanti mooḍhaah
Andhena eva neeyamaanaah yathaa andhaah

(Those foolish men, who, even while remaining in ignorance of the real Self, look upon themselves as realised souls and great

scholars, would again and again enter the vicious circle of birth, life and death, like the blind leading the blind).

This being so, it is unwise to see any differences in the Supreme Spirit of God, which is variously reflected in the various manifestations, without losing its singleness.

Now listen to the verses which preach the non-duality between Vishnu and Shiva.

Śivaaya Vishṇu-roopaaya Śiva-roopaaya Vishṇave
Śivasya hṛdayam Vishṇuh Vishṇoh cha hṛdayam Śivah

(The heart of Vishnu belongs to Shiva, and vice versa; indeed Vishnu and Shiva are two forms of the same entity).

Naaraayanah Śivah Vishṇuh Śankarah Purushottamah
Eteshu naamabhih Brahma param proktam sanaatanam

(The Eternal, Transcendent Self is known by various names like Narayana, Shiva, Vishnu, Shankara and Purushottama).

Harim Haram Vidhaataaram yah paśyet eka-roopiṇam
Sah yaati parama-aanandam Sah Yogee Brahma uchyate

(He who sees Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara as the three froms of the same entity is the true Yogi and is one with the Universal Self).

Mat-bhaktah Śankara-dweshee Mat-dweshee Śankara-priyah
Tau ubhau narakam yātah yaavat chandra-divaakaram

(He who, being devoted to Me, hates Shiva, and he, devoted to Shiva, hates Me — both of them would remain in hell as long as the sun and the moon shine), says Lord Vishnu in 'Vishnu Puraanam'.

Sṛshṭi Sthiti antakaraṇeem Brahma-Vishnu-Ś iva-aatmikaam

Sah samjnaam yaati Bhagavaan ekah eva Janaardanah

(One and the same God bears three names, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva — in conformity with His three respective functions: creation, Preservation and Destruction).

Yah asau Vishṇuh swayam Brahmā yah Brahmā asau Maheśwarah

Veda-traye cha yajne asmin paṇḍiteshu eshah niśchayah

(He who is Vishnu is himself the same as Brahma; and Brahma is the same as Shiva : this is the view of the three Vedas, of the sacrifical rites and of the Vedic scholars).

So, dear friend, even if you have a favourite deity, you can pray to that — only without entertaining any ill-will towards other deities.

TRUTH ABOUT ONE'S SELF

Question : It is my great good fortune that I have a large-hearted and broad-minded Guru like you. You have quelled all my doubts. May I now beseech you to tell me about the nature of my real self, esteemed sir?

Answer : You are indeed a noble soul; else you would not have had such a worthy curiosity.

Since you proved yourself to be of the highest rank of a devotee, now I shall instruct you about your real self. You are now fit to worship the greatest teacher of self knowledge, Dakshinaa Moorti, seating yourself in the Siddha Aasana.

Turn your mind inwards and experience the feeling that you are beyond the *five sheaths* and the *three states*. Then contemplate that real you as the pure consciousness of the Spirit. If ever your mind wanders outwards, ask yourself who you really are, and then answer yourself gently thus :

Na aham manushyah na cha deva-yakshau
Na Brāhmaṇa-Kshatriya-Vaiśya-Ś oodraah
Na brahmachaaree na gṛhee vanasthah
Bhikshuh na cha aham nija-bodha-roopah

(The real I is not a man or a demi–god or a titan; not a Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaisya or Soodra; not a bachelor or a householder or a retired person or a mendicant— but the awakened consciousness of the Supreme Spirit).

Na mrityuh na śankaa na me jaati-bhedah
Pitaa na eva me na eva maataa cha janma
Na bandhuh na mitram guruh na eva śishyah
Chit-aananda-roopah Ś ivah aham Ś ivah aham

(No death or doubt or racial discrimination bothers me; the real I has no parents or birth; I have no real relations or friends or

teacher or disciples — for I am now awake to my oneness with the Universal Self).

Aadi-madhya-anta-rahitah na baddhah aham kadaachana
Sawbhaava-nirmalah śuddhah iti me niśchitaa matih

(The real I has no beginning or middle or end; never am I a bonded man, for I believe my real self is naturally pure and perfect in its God-consciousness).

The scripture says.

Kaala-traye yathaa sarpah rajjau na asti tathaa mayi
Ahankaara-aadi deha-antam jagat na asti aham adwayah

(Just as in neither the past nor the present nor the future does the snake exist in the rope, so also never does the world of the bodily ego exist in my real nondual Self).

Chit-roopatvaat na me jaaḍyam satyatvaat na anritam mamā
Aanandatvaat na me duhkham ajnaanaat bhaati satyavat

(Because I am originally the essence of pure consciousness, there is nothing inconscient in me; because of my natural truth, there is no non-existence or falsehod in me; owing to my blissful nature, never does distress affect me. All the contrary feelings are the result of the illusion of ignorance).

Deha-buddhyaa asmi daasah aham jeeva-buddhyaa Tvat amśakah
Aatma-buddhyaa Tvam eva aham iti me niśchitaa matih

(From the standpoint of the body, I am Thy servant; from that of the ego, I am a part of Thee; and from that of the Self, Thou art I — such is my firm conviction).

Let me tell you again that all the differences that appear in the outside world are merely appearances born of delusion and illusion.

Bhrameṇa aham bhrameṇa tvam bhrameṇa upaasakam manah
Bhrameṇa Eeśwara-bhaavatvam bhrama-moolam idam jagat

(All the feelings of discrimination, like 'I', 'You', 'Praying to something outside of you', 'Mind' and 'Personal God', result from the deluding nature of mankind which in its natural ignorance generally looks outwards and seldom inwards).

But the fact is :

Swayam Brahmaa swayam Vishṇuh swayam Indrah swayam Śivah
Swayam viśwam idam sarvam swasmaat anyat na kinchana

(There is nothing in this world beyond what the individual mind identifies itself with, including Brahma, Vishnu, Indra and Siva).

Now you see how essential it is to identify yourself with the Universal Self, instead of the external appearances.

QUELLING OF DOUBT

Question : Now, sir, I feel impelled to speak out my awareness of reality, which I gained, thanks to your gracious instruction. After hearing me speak the following, will you kindly inform me about anything which I have yet to learn or do?

Adya me saphalam janma cha adya me saphalam tapah
Adya me saphalam jnaanam, Śambho !, Tvat-paada-darśanaat

(O Lord, by the great good fortune of witnessing Thy lotus feet, today I feel that my existence, my penance and my knowledge are fully fruitful).

The Dattaatreya Upanishat tells me :

Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham nityam swa-aatmaanam anjasaa vedmi
Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham Brahma-aanandah-vibhaati me spashtam

(I am twice blessed because I am now ever aware of my true self and because I am now perfectly enjoying the unending bliss of God-realisation).

Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham duhkham saamsaarikam na veekshe adya
Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham swasya ajnaanam palaayitam kwaapi

(I am twice blessed, for now I do not care about the earthly distress and my ignorance has fled from me).

Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham kartavyam me na vidyate kinchit
Dhanyah aham dhanyah aham praaptavyam sarvam adya sampannam

(Twice blessed am I, because there is nothing left for me to do on the mundane plane, now that I have achieved all that I hoped for — the liberation from self-delusion).

Before you reply me, please bless me that I should stay in this happy state for ever, revered sir.

Answer : Dear friend, there is no better offering, no greater thanksgiving, to me from you than that you should remain in this supreme consciousness.

As for your main question, you have nothing left to do hereafter. Now that you are liberated from your worldly bonds, you may go to a quiet spot on the banks of a sacred river. Since you have become a real 'Raaja Yogi' yourself, you must — for the remainder of your life, while you experience without attachment whatever bit of the predestined 'praarabdha' you have to go through — help all those who approach you for guidance, without making any discrimination between men and women, between one race and another race, and between one section of society and another.

When you become a Guru in your own right, you must not try to attract disciples for your own comfort or popularity. Your concern should be only for the edification of your disciples. And even if one is a Vedic scholar, you should not teach him the way of knowledge unless he is equipped with the four means to self-knowledge (saadhana-chatushtaya-sampatti); nor should you teach this wisdom to any rich man offering you alms, if he is not ready to renounce his worldly attachments.

Never hate any other creed that aims at Salvation, even though its appraoch to that goal differs from yours. After all, the evil practices and superstitions of the active religions of the day were not of the making of their original prophets but of their followers of succeeding generations.

Above all, here is something which is of special importance to me. The average teacher insists that the student must be as

utterly obedient as a servant all the time. My view is that you must always be like teachers, but not students. But when you become teachers, you should live up to the highest concept of a teacher.

First you have to be masters of yourselves before you become masters of others. If you go about the world preaching wise words, without attaining this self-restraint, your words will be written on water and serve no useful purpose; on the other hand, the precept that follows practice is like the words carved on stone.

For the benefit of the householders,it is good to have teachers amog the householders themselves so should women be the teachers for women, preferably. Naturally, the celibates and the ascetics should have their preceptors among their own respective ranks.

If we have such ideal preachers and teachers, the world wouldbe a better place to live in. Such teachers must not care too much for public adulation or criticism. If they do care about the public esteem they run the risk of doing and saying things merely to please the crowd.

Never forget that salvation is obtained from truth : "Satyena labhyah". They who tread this path of salvation must be true and perfect wise men. Rather than speak untruth and rule the world, one might speak the truth and remain a pauper.

My dear, good friend, I look upon you as my alter ego. So, preach and save the world to the best of your ability.

OM TAT SAT

DUTIES OF THE SEEKER

Question : Revered sir, will you kindly teach me about the duty which the seeker after truth should perform primarily ?

Answer : He who seeks salvation must be ever conscious of God, unaware of the worldly distinctions of thine and mine, and live in the most unimpeachable manner.

The Chhaandogya Upanishat stresses : "Aachaaryavaan purushah veda" (only he who has a teacher that practices what he preaches can gain the knowledge of God).

The disciple should serve and obey such a teacher in such a way as to make the latter utterly happy to have a great student.

As the saying goes, "sreyaamsi bahu vighnaani" (in the performance of good works many obstacles crop up), you may be faced with occasional difficulties, but you should never be led away from your chosen path because of them. In fact you must welcome such obstacles as the devices God uses to test your dedication and determination. You might also feel that just as it is darkest before dawn so too would your goal be better reached after going through the severest hardships.

Listen to the example Sankaracharya offers in his book, Viveka-choodaamani' :

Akṛtvā śatru-samhaaram agatvaa akhila-bhoo-śriyam
"Raajaa anam" iti śabdaat no raajaa bhavitum arhati

(No man could become a king by merely saying 'I am a king', without first quelling all his enemies and conquering the kingdoms of the world).

Similarly, unless you vanquish the external foes and hurdles, you cannot hope to be the emperor of the kingdom of Heaven.

If by mischance, during your search for God, you fall a prey to temptation — such as eating forbidden food or cohabiting with women —, you should not give up the search for God. All that one has to do is to repent and take proper steps that make the expiation meaningful and permanent, for would there be so great

a fool as not to clean his foot when he steps on dirt and then take greater care not to repeat that action ?

Take the example of sage Viswaamitra. On one occassion, when he was extremely hungry and had no other food accessible, he ate the flesh of a dog. On another occasion, he fell a prey to the charms of the heavenly damsel, Menaka. But did he give up his endeavour to become a 'Brahmarshi' (a sage who is also fit to be called a Brahmin) ? Indeed, he had his arch rival, sage Vasishtha, to hail him by his self-effort-acquired title, first of all.

Prahlaada did not forsake his belief in Lord Vishnu, even when he was cruelly persecuted by his own father.

Lord Jesus had not retracted his pronouncements, even when he was about to be crucified.

King Harischandra never went back on his word, even when he and his family were threatened with the worst imaginable calamity.

Samaadhau kriyamaaṇe tu vighnaani aayaanti vai balaat
*Anusandhaana-raahityam aalasyam bhoga-laalasam**

And just as in the battles for the earthly kingdom, so also in the fight for self-emancipation, one must not fear physical loss or death. Hear what Lord Krishna told Arjuna :

Hatah vaa praapsyasi swargam jitvaa vaa bhokshyase maheem
Tasmaat uttishṭha, Kaunteya!, yuddhaaya kṛta-niśchayah

(If in the battle you are killed you will go to the paradise that is the reward of heroes; or if you conquer your enemies you will rule the whole world. So keep fighting for your just rights).

If you are sincere in your Yogic practice, and yet cannot complete it, you have a chance of going to heaven and again returning to the earth by taking birth in a noble family : then you have another chance of reaching your goal of self-realisation. If you persevere in your efforts, however, you will eventually win Liberation.

* Translated earlier

Again the Lord says :

Śraddhaavaan labhate jnaanam Tat-parah samyata-indriyah
Jnaanam labdhvaa paraam śaantim achireṇa adhigacchati

(The man of faith, with single-minded attention on God, and with his senses well-restrained, would beget Knowledge — which enables him to enjoy supreme peace before long).

You should never rest or give up till you reach your goal.

I will now tell you a story.

Bahubhih na viroddhavyam ekena api baleeyasaa
Sah paraabhavam aapnoti samudrah iva ṭiṭṭibhaat

(Even if one were a strong man one should not antagonise numerous persons. If he earns the enmity of a large number of even little creatures like birds, he would regret his step, like the sea in the story).

A 'tittibha' bird was laying eggs in a sand-castle on the beach. When the sea was in high tide the swelling waves would wash them away. When the female bird suggested to her mate that they go elsewhere, as she was expecting to lay fresh eggs, the male replied that they had no longer to fear the sea, for he had the measure of the sea-lord then. Hearing his boast the sea-god wanted to punish him and accordingly snatched away the newly-laid eggs also. As the female bird was grieving over the loss, the male assured her that he would see to it that the sea dries up so that they could recover their eggs. Then he started sucking a drop of the seawater and dropping it over the sand, in an attempt to suck up the whole sea. He did not give up his reckless attempt, even when his fellow-birds warned him against its fuitility. Instead, he asked them all to follow his example in taking out the seawater. While they were thus engaged, sage Naarada happened to pass that way, and on hearing their tale he advised them to desist from the vain attempt.

Still, the bird would not give up. Taking pity on the poor bird, the sage went up to the abode of Lord Vishnu, Vaikuntha, and reported the matter to the divine bird, Garuda (the conveyance of the Lord). He even taunted Garuda that the latter would lose his title of 'bird-king' if he would not support his race of birds on earth or if the birds now engaged in the fight with the sea would succeed on their own. Thus provoked by the wily sage, Garuda went down to the earth and started flying over the sea, making the sea-lord whirl in pain by the force of the flight of the bird-king's wings. Then, picking up the seawater with his claws and beak, Garuda began to dry the whole sea. Frightened, the sea-lord, Varuna, sought the divine bird's forgiveness, surrendering at the same time the eggs he hitherto washed away.

So, you see, with sincere dedication, even little men can gain Salvation, by winning the grace of God.

And then, remember that, howsoever painful the effort is, the result is always blissful, as the Lord says :

Yat tat agre visham iva pariṇaame amrita-upamam
Tat sukham saattvikam proktam aatma-buddhi-prasaadajam

(Know that to be the noble bliss of 'Sattva', the evoker of self-knowledge, which at first tastes bitter like poison but ultimately becomes the nectar of wisdom).

"Kashte phale", is the common saying that proves, "no pains, no gains". The people of the 'Raajasika' and the 'Taamasika' qualities would give up when they are faced with obstacles, but not the "Saattvika" seekers.

Swami Vivekananda took as his main slogan the words Lord Yama spoke to Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishat :

"Uttishthata ! Jaagrata ! Praapya varaan nibodhata !

(Arise, awake and learn from the wise men the truth of the Soul !). The complete quotation has these words in addition : "Kshurasya dhaaraa nisitaa duratyayaa durgam pathah tat kavayah vadanti" (The wise men describe this path of salvation to be as sharp as the edge of a razor and it must be trodden with great care and effort).

Lord Krishna also warns against the relaxation of the effort in the search for Truth :

Aśraddhayaa hutam dattam tapah taptam kṛtam cha yat
'Asat' iti uchyate, Paartha!, na cha tat pretya no iha

(There is no reward here or beyond for the sacrifices or alms or penances or actions which are done with recklessness; indeed they are described by wise men as 'atheistic' deeds).

We may take the example of the paddy field : if it not grown with due care, and protected from stray cattle and weeds, it does not yield any grain.

Apart from the strenuous effort, which offers its rich reward, the thing that most deserves the attention of the seeker is equanimity.

Bhartrihari says :

Nindantu neeti-nipuṇaah yadi vaa stuvantu
Lakshmeeh samaaviśatu gacchatu vaa yathaa-ishṭam
Adya eva vaa maraṇam astu yuga-antare vaa
Nyaayaat pathah pravichalanti padam na dheeraah

(Let the wiseacres praise or blame, let riches come or go, let death take place today or after another age, the brave realised souls never waver from the path of justice).

You must not also be disturbed by the thoughtless words you hear spoken about the institution of Sannyaasa — such as "Why should you eat the expensive fruits and drink the costly milk ? Can't you get salvation by eating ordinary food ? Why don't you do honest work, instead of roaming about like a loafer ?".

You must ignore such taunts. Indeed, they who insult you share your sins and surrender the good effect of their virtue.

No doubt, there are false mendicants and monks. But that is no reason why the sincere seeker who looks for salvation, and who thereafter shows the wearied world the way out of its distress,should be jeered at.

So, my friend, there are two things which a seeker must specially relinquish : Woman and Gold. These are the two wings of the mind-bird in its wavering flights. You must cut them off with the help of the sword of Detachment, thereby enabling the mind to settle in its unmoving concentration on God.

Vedhaat vedhaa bhramam chakre kaantaasu kanakeeshu cha
Taasu teshu api asaktah hi Narah Naaraayanah bhavet

(The Lord, with the help of His creative principle of 'Maayaa', manufactured two delusion-causing things, woman and gold : the man who is detached from these two lures becomes the equal of God).

For this we can find no better illustration than that of Lord Buddha who forsook his kingdom and his beautiful spouse in his search for Truth.

Śankārāchārya puts it properly :
Kim atra heyam kanakam cha kaantaa
Sevyam sadaa kim Guru-Veda-vaakyam

(What is the thing that must be rejected most in this world ? Gold and Woman. And what is it that must be most welcomed ? The instruction of the Guru and of the Vedas).

The seeker must never get into an argument in self-defence when he is wrongly blamed by the others.

We see things with our eyes but cannot see our own eyes. Similarly we can detect our faults only through the help of others but not by ourselves. Only when a man accepts with good grace the criticism from others and tries to correct his errors, as others see them, will he be able to realise his real Self — like a fast-flowing, river straightly joining the sea. On the other hand, the man who merely indulges in finding fault with others, will quickly fall from grace like water down the hill.

So when others blame you, it is wise to find out sincerely whether you are really to blame and then to rectify any defect in you.

—

HUMAN EANDEAVOUR

Question : Sir, just as a pregnant woman cannot be delivered of a child unless the fetus is nurtured in the womb for full nine months, and a tree cannot bring forth fruit till it is fully grown and the proper season arrives, is it not true that, howsoever a man may try, his actions cannot bear fruit unless and until other factors like time and fate aid him ?

Answer : Dear friend, such words do not become you. These queries should have been put by lesser intellects.

The point is, the embryo and the tree are inconscient things, which have no self-will, unlike man. Man is granted the power to pick and choose, to change and improve.

Apart from the fact that the sacred books inform us about certain sages who were born soon after conception, there is the fact that the trees and the like yield their fruit in accordance with the nourishment they receive.

As for human endeavour itself, you see the difference in the means chosen to reach a particular goal. If you want to go to Varanasi, the time it takes you to get there varies according to the nature of the transport you take.

In such cases as the writing of 'Raama Koti' (the word 'Raama' written on paper ten million times) the result is the same in the final analysis, but they who finish their task earlier get that benefit earlier than those who do it later.

We also see the differences in the people who are equally employed in a regular job : they who put in extra work get extra wages, and they who do better than average are rewarded with emoluments like 'bonus'.

So the science of philosophy divides men into three classes : the highest, who are endowed with intense faith ; the mediocre, who have average faith; and the lowly who have no faith.

Like the employees who earn more in less time through greater effort, the seekers who are more dedicated than the others receive their reward of God-realisation quicker than the others.

The man of immense faith recognises the need to go through the 'Praarabdha' part of his destiny without complaint. Then, doing his duty by his family with honesty and faithfulness, he spends his spare time in doing good works and worshipping God. Naturally he earns liberation in the quickest possible time.

The man of mediocre faith does neither good works nor indulge in evil acts but fulfils his regular duty with the needed ability. He will get his salvation in due course.

The man of no faith does no good, behaves evilly and hurts others. Such a man will not find liberation until after a million births.

So, you see, it is not time or fate, but human endeavour by itself that is the main cause of liberation.

Take another example. It is the common one of 'as you sow, so you reap'. The farmer who realises that certain varieties of grain fetch him greater benefits than the others which ripen quicker has to exercise patience in growing the crops that are harvested a little later than the other ones. Besides, the harvest depends upon the nature of the seed sown. The field of the human body is capable of growing tares as well as paddy. It is up to man to make the right choice.

Even if one has to experience the effects of past deeds, inevitably, the good deeds done in the present will lessen the bad effects considerably.

Paapam vinaa śareerasya duhkham na asti pade pade
Yat kinchit driśyate duhkham sarvam paapa-samudbhavam

(The human body does not have to suffer pain unless the human being is guilty of sinful acts. Wherever there is distress it is all the result of evil action).

Sthoolam cha eva atha sookshmam cha duhkham paapa-samudbhavam
Apāpam cha dayaa syaat vai śareeram sukha-bhaajanam

(Verily, whether gross or subtle, human distress is the fruit of evil alone; and where there is no evil and where mercy flourishes, there reigns happiness supreme).

Bhogam vinaa na praarabdham gacchati iti su-nischitam

(It is absolutely certain that tha decrees of predestination have to be undergone, before one is fit for Salvation).

The foregoing message was given by 'Skaanda Puraanam'.

If we see in our midst some good people or devotees suffering pain, and some bad people in our midst enjoying pleasure, we can only attribute both effects to their respective past acts.

We see in the clock three hands, of the hour, the minute and the second. The revolutions of the three hands vary in a given period. Likewise, the men of noble nature get their reward, in the manner of the seconds hand; those of the mediocre nature, in the maner of the minutes hand; and the dull intellects, in the manner of the hours hand.

People with faith, dedication and detachment receive deliverrance in a single birth. So please don't listen to the foolish words of the false prophets but always pray to God with sustained effort.

'Vyaaghree iva tishthati jaraa paritarjayantee
Rogaah cha śatravah iva praharanti deham
Aayuh prasravati bhinna-ghataat iva ambhah
Lokah tathaa api ahitam aacharati iti chitram

(Old age is holding one in its grip like a tigress; disease is attacking one's body like a foe : one's life is ebbing like the water in a pot with a hole; and yet, what a pity that one continues in the evil ways and harms oneself wifully), wails an Upanishat.

Indeed the seekers must even forego food and sleep to attain their goal, for life is momentary and brief. We must manipulate our daily schedule to allow ourselves the maximum time for self-emancipation, for, time is elastic and can be expanded or contracted according to our needs and skill.

We must earn only that much money which helps us to feed and clothe ourselves adequately. Even if one has more money than one wants, it is better to spend it on charity for the poor than to overeat and suffer from indigestion and disease.

The 'Saadhus' who waste their little means on 'Ganja' and other evil habits also must take care to make good use of their time instead.

Alpa aahaarah swalpa nidraa Yoginaam paraman vratam

(The highest vow of the Yogis is little food and less sleep).

Vairaagyam cha mumukshutvam teevram yasya tu vidyate
Tasmin eva arthavantah syuh phalavantah śama-aadayah

(Only that seeker, who masters intense renunciation and the wish for liberation, would find his noble qualities like self-restraint fruitful).

Etayoh mandataa yatra viraktatva-mumukshayoh
Marau salilavat tatra śama-aadeh bhrama-maatrataa

(In whom such detachment and salvation-seeking are lacking, his good practices would be as 'useful' as water in the mirage).

Practice and precept which go together, but not external garb and oral pronouncements, make a Sannyasin or a Yogi.

And,

Atyanta-vairāgyavatah samaadhih samaahitasya eva dṛdha-prabodhah
Prabuddha-tattvasya hi bandha-muktih mukta-aatmanah nitya sukha-anubhootih

(Only for a man of extreme detachment is the trance possible; only to the man in the trance would the true knowledge become obvious; only for a man of firm knowledge is the deliverance from worldly bonds feasible; and only for such a liberated soul is the eternal beatitude within ready reach).

So the first and foremost step is detachment.

The man engaged in God-realisation faces two tests: one is from the human agency and the other from the divine elements.

The first is evident in disease, loss of property, enmity of kith and kin, addiction to evil habits and the like.

The other is in the shape of miraculous powers which the Yogic practitioner obtains from the pleased gods. This gives the seeker a chance of earning fame and fortune : the bachelor is offered the hand of rich girls, and the ascetic seeks monetary help to establish a monastery.

The sincere seeker should be able to withstand these two tests. When faced with either calamity or temptation, the seeker should approach a good Guru for guidance.

There is such a thing as too much of a good thing, which is just as bad as a bad thing. Just as the crops fail without rain, so too would they by too much of it.

One must treat both pleasure and pain as a golden pin and an iron pin respectively: if pierced with either, the eye gets severely hurt. The seeker who succumbs to either joy or grief is also similarly injured.

Vaasudeve manah yasya japa-homa-archanaadishu
Tasya antaraayah, Maitreya!, Devendratvaadikam phalam

(To the man seeking God-realisation through meditation, sacrifice and prayer, the attainment of the material kingdom of Heaven — equal status with the Lord of Hosts, Indra — is an obstacle), said sage Paraasara to Maitreya in Vishnu Puraanam.

Says Bhartrihari :

Aarambha gurvee kshayiṇee krameṇa
Laghvee puraa vriddhim upaiti paśchaat
Dinasya poorvārdha paraardha bhinnā
Chhaayaa iva maitree khala sajjanaanaam

(The friendship with the virtuous and with the wicked is like the shadow cast in the afternoon and in the forenoon respectively — the former is short to begin with but increases gradually, whereas the latter is long at first but grows short gradually).

Similar is the experience of the seeker : the bad one begins ostentatiously but gives up soon, whereas the good one starts slowly and improves progressively.

Lord Krishna says :

Aśrat-dadhaanaah purushaah dharmasya asya, Parantapa!
Aprāpya Maam nivartante mṛtyu-samsaara-vartmani

(They who have no perfect faith in this supreme order of the Spirit, would fail in their attempt at Salvation, and again enter the circle of life and death — without ever attaining to My status).

Again :

Ajnah cha aśrat-dadhaanah cha samśayaa-aatmaa vinaśyati
Na ayam lokah asti na parah na sukham samśaya-aatmanah

(The man of ignorance, lack of faith and self-doubt perishes. For such a doubting man there is no happiness in this world or the other).

In the matter of food also the seeker should be extremely careful, because food has a great effect on the mind. You don't have to look far to be convinced of this : look at the tiger and the cow. The larger animal is gentle because of the vegetarian diet and the smaller one is cruel because it is carnivorous.

Here is an instructive story. It is obtained in the Canarese book, 'Geetaa Rahasyamu'.

In Bangalore there is a Vedic scholar by name Raamachandra Saastri. He is of an unimpeachable character and his wife is equally pious. One day he invited a noble hermit, named Vaasudevaananda, for 'Bhiksha' (food given to the monks as part of sacred alms). By the time the lunch had to be prepared the lady of the house was menstruating and was traditionally unfit to cook

the food. She sought the help of a woman-cook of the same Brahmin caste to prepare and serve the lunch for the monk. While eating the lunch, he was tempted to steal the silver cup in which the porridge was served.

The next day, after answering the calls of nature and bathing, the monk found his conscience troubling him. So he went back to the home of his host, and sobbing and falling prostrate at the latter's feet, sought his forgiveness. Unable to understand the reason for this gesture, the host also bowed to the monk's feet and sobbingly sought the latter's forgiveness.

Neither monk nor host knew the real reason for seeking each other's forgiveness. Seeing all this commotion, an intelligent by-stander asked the monk about the sort of food he ate the previous day. On learning that it was the other woman who cooked the food, he knew the reason why the monk was tempted to steal.

The cook was of loose morals, and a petty thieif. When he ate the food she served, the monk was affected by her character, but when the next day he digested it and defecated, he regained his original innocence and realised his guilt.

It is to prevent such eventualities that the monks are advised by the scriptures not to stay for long as guests of any householder.

Both the cook and the dinner must be equally God-minded.

Anna-doshena chittasya kaalushyam sarvadaa bhavet
Kalushee-krita-chittaanaam Dharmah samyak na bhaasate

(By eating faulty food the mind gets ever besmirched; and Dharma — rectitude and dutiful righteousness — can never be appreciated or apprehended by such a sullied mind).

Abhakshyasya nivṛttyaa tu viśuddham hṛdayam bhavet
Aahaara-śuddhau chittasya viśuddhih bhavati swatah

(By rejecting the wrong kind of food like the non-vegetarian, the person's heart becomes pure; verily by the mere purity of the food one eats, one automatically gains purity of mind).

Chitta-śuddhau kramaat jnaanam trutyanti granthayah sphuṭam
Abhakshyam Brahma-vijnaana-viheenasya eva dehinah

(By virtue of the purification of the mind, gradually the knots of ignorance that bind one's mentation get cut, and knowledge will then shine clearly. Indeed the wrong food a man eats is at the root of his inability to realise God).

Let not the seekers ever forget these wise words of the Paasupata Brahma Upanishat.

Let every one remember the popular saying; "He who eats once a day is a Yogi; he who eats twice a day is a 'Bhogi' — lover of luxury or a householder — ; he who eats thrice a day is a 'Rogi' — sick man — ; and he who eats four times a day is a living corpse".

Eka-vaaram charet bhaikshyam na prasajyeta vistare
Bhaikshya-prasaktah hi yatih vishayeshu api sajjati.

(A monk should eat only once a day, and must not think of eating often. He who is fond of eating much would equally be bound by his senses).

Dvau bhaagau poorayet annaih toyena ekam prapoorayet
Maarutasya prachaara-artham chaturtham avaśeshayet

(One must fill only half of one's stomach with food; one-fourth of it must be filled with water ; the other one-fourth of it must be left empty for the movement of air).

Such an eater would never be attacked by disease.

Anaarogyam anaayushyam aswargyam cha ati-bhojanam
Apuṇyam loka-vidwishṭam tasmaat tat parivarjayet

(Over-eating is the cause of ill-health, short life, going to hell, vice and ill-fame; so it must be abandoned), says the law-giver Manu.

Besides, as far as practicable, the monk must try to earn his daily bread by himself. Such work as is needed for the bare

sustenance of the body is not the same as the enslaving wordly actions. Lord Krishna admits ; "Saareeram kevalam karma kurvan na aapnoti kilbisham" (doing the work just enough to maintain the body does not make man sinful).

As noted on an earlier occasion, celibacy is of the utmost importance to the seeker ;

Brahmacharyena santishthet apramaade manaskaree (one should keep one's mind alert by remaining in the vow of celibacy).

While the bachelor is advised against any contact with women, the householder is regarded as a celibate, if he cohabits with his wife during her fertile period, with the sole intention of procreation, as suggested by this verse from Jaabaala Darsana Upanishat :

Kaayena manasaa vaachaa streeṇaam tu parivarjanam
Ṛtau bhaaryaam tadaa swasya Brahmacharyam tat uchyate

Just as the bait is placed on the hook to catch the fish, flesh in the net to catch the birds, and food in the trap to catch the mice, so are women, money and rich food placed before the seekers of God by the worldly people, as this verse points out :

Manoharaaṇaam bhojyaanaam yuvateenaam suvaasasaam
Vittasya api cha saannidhyaat chalet chittam sataam api

(Even the mind of wise men is deluded by delicious food-stuffs, well-dressed young women and money).

Asammaanaat tapo-vṛddhih sammaanaat tapasah kshayah
Architah poojitah viprah dugdhau gauh iva seedati

(If the world does not respect one, one is further determined in ones's pursuis of penance, whereas the man who is much honoured by the populace finds his dedication decreased like the udder of the cow which is just milked).

Aaśaayaah ye daasaah te daasaah sarva-lokasya
Aaśaa daasee yeshaam teshaam daasaayate lokah

(He who is a slave to ambition is enslaved by the whole world; he whose slave is ambition makes of the whole world his servant).

Yaavat sarvam na santyaktam taavat Aatmaa na labhyate
Sarva-vastu-parityaage śeshah Aatmaa iti kathyate

(Unless every external possession or ambition is rejected, the Self cannot be realised; indeed, when every worldly thing is rejected, all that remains is the Self).

Manah naama mahaa-vyaaghrah vishaya-aranya-bhoomishu
Charati atra na gacchantu saadhavah he mumukshavah!

(O gentle seekers of Salvation, please do not wander into the cravings of the mind which is like the tiger roaming about in the forest of the senses).

And always remember these words of Advaitaaropanishat :

Guruh eva paraa-kaashthaa guruh eva param dhanam
Yasmaat tat upadeshtā asau tasmaat gurutarah guruh

(The teacher is the highest goal of life, the greatest riches one can get. So he who is well instructed by such a Guru, himself become a greater Guru).

TEACHER'S INTEGRITY

Unless the teacher himself is of a noble character, he cannot make his disciple noble.

As fast as the engine moves, so does the wagon attached to it.

Great teachers like Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, Christ and Kabir made their pupils their worthy heirs.

Here is a story.

In a village in South India, there were two friends, Raagaya and Daamayya. Their teachers were different. Raagayya's teacher, though an able one, was a householder and observed no strict rules in the matter of diet. Daamayya's teacher was a strict bachelor and observed all the rules enjoined by the sacred books.

The two friends, still young, started on a pilgrimage to Varanasi. In those days there were no rail communications, and they went on foot, eating at charitable institutions on the way.

As they proceeded, on one occasion, they had to pass through a forest for two days without food. At last they reached a small village, where the only people who could offer them hospitality were non-vegetarians. Even though Daamayya advised him against succumbing to his hunger and eating the meat, Raagayya consoled himself with the thought that his own teacher was an indiscriminate eater, and further argued, with dubious logic, that the Gita would sanction his eating, because, according to him, the scripture says that one can eat what one was offered, as long as one does not seek it, through the words : "Yadricchaa laabha–santushtah" (he is a worthy seeker who is pleased with whatever he gets). Daamayya was for a while persuaded, but when the food was actually served, he did not touch it, for he was reminded of the Gita words, "Swadharme nidhanam sreyah" (death is beneficial in doing one's apportioned duty). Raagayya was still unconvinced by his friend's restraint or advice.

At the next stop, after going through another jungle, foodless and drinkless, they were offered toddy to quench their thirst. While Daamayya resisted the temptation, Raagayya, already affected by the meat-eating, willingly drank up the country liquor.

After a while they re-started on their journey and spent the night at an inn (charitable institution). There were no other guests there excepting a young maidservant. She welcomed the duo. When they were rested, she asked them to sing a song. Daamayya was afraid of making friends with her, but the drunken Raagayya fell a prey to her wiles, and began to sing a song.

Agni-kuṇḍa-samaa naaree ghṛta-kumbha-samah narah
Samsargeṇa vileeyeta tasmaat taam parivarjayet

(Woman is like a furnace and a man is like a pot of clarified butter which gets melted in the contact with the former. So a wise man seeking salvation should keep away from women).

Forgetting this message of sage Daattaatreya, Raagayya began making love to the servant girl, while his friend went out into the open air, despite the falling snow, to protect his vow of celibacy.

Raagayya stayed on, married the women, begat a family, and fell into the trap of 'samsaara'.

Daamayya proceeded to Varanasi alone, stayed there in deep meditation, and before long gained soulful bliss.

The moral of this tale is that if the teacher is a man of great character, his disciples would be equally strong in mind. Even thoguh the internal renunciation of Raagayyar's Guru was perfect, Raagayya was influenced by the former external bad habits.

It is for this reason that the great teachers of the past, even when they had no need to puruse external activities, still engaged themselves in the worldly pursuits to set a good example to the laymen.

Yadvat mantra-bala-upetah kreeḍan sarpaih na dṛśyate
Kreeḍan na lipyate jnaanee tadvat indriya-pannagaih

(Just as a man well-versed in the snake charms can play with the snakes with impunity, so also can the man of god-knowledge can play safely with the sense-serpents).

So there is no harm for the realised soul in taking to public activity. However, this public activity must not mean sensuous indulgence. Especially, if a man who is not fully equipped with self-knowledge tries to give rein to his sensual feelings he would be stung by the asp of the same senses.

Abhakshya-bhakshaṇe śraddhaa tathaa abhakshyasysa bhakshaṇam
Abhakshyam Brahma-vijnaana-viheenasya eva dehinah

(By either thinking of eating or actully eating the forbidden foods, man harms his chances of begetting divine knowledge).

Jnaane mama udite bhogaah kim kurvanti iti ye viduh
Bhoge sangam mateh bhangam jnaana-śaithilyam aapnuyuh

(If anyone who has attained knowledge thinks that he will now be untouched by luxuries, he would soon see that his luxury-mindedness results in the destruction of his sensibility as well as of his very knowledge).

—

SECRET OF MIND-CONTROL

Question : Will you kindly enlighten me and my fellow-seekers on how best to control the flights of the mind, revered sir ?

Answer : You have asked a very pertinent question. This kind of question was also put to Krishna by Arjuna, to Vasishtha by Raama, and to Ribhu by Nidaagha.

The 'Bhaagavata Puraanam' propounds :

Daanam swa-dharmah niyamah yamah cha
S'rutaani karmaaṇi cha sat-vrataani
Sarve mano-nigraha-lakshaṇa-antaah
Parah hi Yogah manasah samaadhih

(Charity, dutifulness, strict regimen, restraint, scriptural studies, good works, pious deeds and the like are meant to control the mind. Yoga indeed transcends these and subjugates the mind in a trance-like state).

To Arjuna's famous question concerning the difficulty of controlling the mind, Krishna replies :

Asamśayam, Mahaabaaho!, manah durnigraham chalam
Abhyaasena tu, Kaunteya, vairaagyeṇa cha gṛhyate

(No doubt, it is hard to restrain the fickle mind; but it can be controlled by means of detachment and strict practice of Yoga).

The 'Yoga Sootra' supports this statement :

Abhyaasa-vairaagyaabhyaam tat-nirodhah

(The control of the mind is achieved through practice and renunciation).

Now, how to acquire this sense of detachment and the ability to stick to regular practice ?

First one should analyse the consequences of the things one's mind is strongly inclined to do. By such far-sightedness the mind of its own accord would get back to its firm original state. Take the example of a merchant. If he is told that he cannot buy a thing for less than one hundred rupees, and if he calculates the expenses of transporting it to his shop and realises that he cannot re-sell it for more than one hundred rupees, he would not buy the thing, in the first place. Similarly the mind that thinks of the fruits of the action it is intent upon would desist from proceeding further, if it is well aware of their unwelcome nature.

Or take the example of the balance. The scale which holds the heavier thing hangs down. One must imagine the state of god-awareness and that of worldly temptation as the two scales of the mind, and try to keep the former outweighing the latter. The process is familiar to those who watch the weights added to the scale that is less heavy, in order to balance the two scales. So one must attempt to curb the mental allurements by adding the weights of spiritual consciousness whenever the earthly lures get the other scale hanging down.

For this purpose the guidance of a good teacher and the constant meditation are the requisite weights.

By observing the field which is well fertilised and another which is weed-filled, both of which are side by side and owned by the same person, one can get an idea of what follows.

Or look at how the wild animals are tamed, and how some domestic animals like bulls are taught pleasings tricks.

All this would teach you that the mind can be trained.

Aatmanah anyat na hi kwa api Aatmanah anyat tṛṇam na hi
Aatmanah anyat tusham na asti sarvam Aatma-mayam jagat

(Beyond the Eternal Soul there is nothing else eternally true; all that is beyond it is mere husk or useless grass. Indeed the whole universe is the mere external manifestation of the one transcendent Self).

If one constantly contemplates these words of Tejabindu Upanishat one will understand that one's own mind is unreal in relation to the eternal Self:

And then one must continue these thoughts with the auto-suggestion implied by these words :

Chit-aatmaa aham para-aatmaa nirguṇah aham Paraat-parah
Aatma-maatreṇa yah tishthet sah jeevanmuktah uchyate

(He who is aware of the fact that he is one with the Supreme consciousness, the Transcendent Self, the Attributeless Absolute, and the Ultimate Reality, and is steady and stable in that awareness, is called a 'Jeevanmukta').

The following verse signifies the 'great dictum' (Mahaa vaakyam), "Aham Brahmaa asmi" (I am God):

Deha-traya-atiriktah aham śuddha-chaitanyam asmi aham
"Brahmaa aham" iti yasya antah sah jeevanmuktah uchyate

(He, who feels in his heart of hearts that he is above and beyond the three material entities of gross, subtle and causal bodies and that he is Pure Consciousness, and tells himself that 'I am the Supreme Self', is called "Jeevan-mukta").

By telling yourself this, which is easier than the earlier-mentioned definition, you will gradually realise your identity with the Soul. This message is further stressed :

Na aham dehah na cha praaṇah na indriyaaṇi manah na hi
Sadaa saakshitva-roopatvaat "Śivah eva asmi" kevalah

("I am not my body, nor my vital breath, nor my senses, nor my mind, but because of my constant witnessing of myself as the realiser of 'I am essentially one with God', I am nothing but the Universal Self).

When the object of sight is removed, the seer still remains. You must tell yourself that you are the subject of the sight that for ever remains existent in your soul-consciousness.

Now you must clinch the issue thus.

Na me chittam na me buddhih na ahankaarah na cha indriyah
Na me dehahkadaachit vaa na me praaṇa-aadayah kwachit

("I no longer have any external mentation, external intellect, material ego, transient sense-organ, or even the phenomenal bodily consciousness : then how can I ever be any other physical force like the vital breath or the 'life-sheath'?)

And then you are ready to separate the eternal from the transitory:

Anaatma-bhoote dehādau aatma-buddhih tu dehinaam
Saa avidyaa tat-kṛtah bandhah tat-naaśe Mokshah uchyate

(The human beings conceive the ever-living self in the living-dying body of theirs; it is this ignorance or nescience that causes their enslavement to physical consciousness; but once one is free from such misconception one is the possessor of the perpetual freedom of Salvation).

In the case of electricity we have the energy, the generator, the wire and the gadget. So has the gadget of the human body four parts or phases. The primal electric energy is the Supreme Self with which the individual is endowed by way of the phenomenal creative principle of 'Maayaa'; the generator is the mind and its three other facets; the sense-organs are the wires; the gadget or bulb is the body itself.

You must learn to separate the lower facets or parts from the one above, till you finally reach the original primordial creative energy with which the living creature's soul is ever united.

From the standpoint of this Supreme Self the three manifestations are unreal. Since the driving force is the 'intellect' derived from the 'soul', the human being cannot escape the responsibility for the doings of the body. The fake 'sannyaasins' are misleading their men devotees and even seducing their woman devotees, with the specious argument that the body's actions are untouched by the soul.

Of course, in reality the soul is untouched by the body, but the man who realises this fact would never let his body misbehave, because in such a case the realisation would once again disappear and he would once more become a slave to his senses.

Nirvaasanam harim dṛshṭvaa tooshṇeem vishaya-dantinah
Palaayante na śaktaah te sevante kṛta-chaaṭavah

(On seeing the lion of detachment the sense-elephants flee. To the man of detached consciousness the sense-organs are helpless obedient servants), says 'Ashtaavakra Geetaa'.

Deha-indriya-mana-buddhi-prakritibhyah vilakshaṇam
Tat vṛtti-saakshiṇam vidyaat Aatmaanam raajavat sadaa

(One must conceive the Atman as the supreme entity entirely different from the physical functions of the body or the sense-organs or the mind or the intellect, and as the mere witness of these bodily activities. Indeed, the Atman is like the king who gets the things done by the menials, without himself being involved in the doings).

The real 'Raaja Yoga' has to realise the fact that the Atman is the King (Raajaa) and the senses are the servants. To let the senses rule one's self is to let the subjects rule the king.

The important thing is to control the very wish before the act is done.

A seeker says the following in the "Jeevanmukti Prakaasikaa":

Kaama ! Jaanaami te moolam sankalpaat kila jaayase
Na tvaam sankalpayishyaami sa-moolah tvam vinaśyasi

(O Desire, ! now know your source : you are the offspring of the 'wish'; so I will stop all wishing and wanting, and you will never again be born).

There are five different kinds of mind.

Mooḍha : This mind belongs to the dull-witted people of "tamo guna". Such a mind cannot distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, and is mainly impelled by lust and wrath.

Kshipta : This is also known as "kashaaya", and belongs to the "rajo guna". This is fickle and wavers between pain and pleasure.

Vikshipta : This is of the mode of "sattva". Chiefly it tends to the enjoyment of the good things of life.

Ekaagra : Such a mind is the property of the sages, never wandering about the wordly attractions but always concentrating on God.

Nirodha : This indeed is the control of mental activity. It is within the reach of only those who realise God in this very existence. These 'Jeevanmukta's transcend all pain and pleasure and remain firmly entranced in their pure self-awareness.

To the people having the first three kinds of mind, the Yoga, which is defined as the 'cessation of mental activity', is out of bounds. They keep coming and going in the realm of 'samsaara'.

Self-knowledge and salvation are attainable by the two last-mentioned minds. They should find out any defects in their character and conduct, correct them and strive for self-emancipation and consequent liberation from 'samsaara'.

The more one controls the mind the nearer one is to God. In fact, the mind should merge in the soul as does the salt in the water.

Again, the mind has two functions —"Pravritti" (attachment) and "nivritti" (detachment). It is like the mirror. When you turn your face towards the mirror, only yourself — not the world — is reflected. When you turn the mirror towards the world, the seeing person is not reflected but the world.

If the mind is controlled and turned inwards, only the Soul will be revealed. If it is directed towards the earthly lures, only the sensual pleasures appear before one and nothing else.

If the mind cannot at once be controlled and turned inwards, one can try the gradual method suggested by the Lord in the twelth chapter of the Gita.

The best way is to concentrate the mind and the intellect on godly meditation.

If this is not possible, Yogic practice is the second best.

If even this is not possible, doing good works as an offering to God is suggested.

The lower steps are, gradually, taking refuge in God, and leaving the results of one's actions in His hands ; doing pious deeds to the best of one's ability ; reading or hearing sacred books; not doing evil deeds; helping those that do good; rejoicing in the goodness of others; rather than spending time on useless gossip, speaking only good words; and, if all these things are also beyond one's reach, the best thing is not to do either good or bad, and remain quiet. If all this patient counsel is unheeded, all that remains for man is to be caught in the unending cylce of "samsaara".

And remember this :

Kartaa Kaarayitaa cha eva prerakah cha anumodakah
Puṇya-kaarye paapa-kaarye chatvaarah sama-bhaaginah

(The man who makes another do something, the man who provokes another to do something, and the man who approves another's act — these three men share its evil as well as good effects along with the man who actually does the deed).

So never incite evil, let alone doing it yourself.

And at all times keep checking your individual progress, bearing in mind that even failure in a sincere attempt is a stepping stone to success. As you set aside the outward impulses one by one when you step higher and higher, you will eventually reach the highest goal of life : Self-realisation.

EVOLUTION OR TRANSFORMATION OF THE PHYSIQUE

Question : Would a man born of a low casts lose his hereditary characteristics when he attains self-knowledge or salvation ? How can people believe you if you maintain that all the former habits of his, like meat-eating (if not directly, he must have inherited the effects from his meat-eating parents), would be absolved then ?

Answer : You raised a pertinent point, but you seem to have been misled by ill-reasoning preceptors. Now let me clear your reasonable doubts.

I am pained to hear the comparison between the inconscient trees and the conscient human beings. The human body undergoes constant growth and decay ; every seven years or so the body acquires a new entity. This change takes place mainly due to the food the person eats. The food changes into nutrient essence; then into blood; then into flesh; then into bone-marrow; then into semen and the like, which make up the whole body. During the course of one day the inhalations and the exhalations of the breath occur hundreds of times — the oxygen changing into a steam-like substance which transforms the entire physical entity of man. We can see this change by means of an experiment; when you heat the water in a glass, it turns into steam and its quantity is thereby reduced. Men and women lose blood in various ways. When one fasts or is on diet, one loses weight. Only in the Yogi's trance the oxygen in the body remains constant. During the Yogic practice, however, the body undergoes the usual changes, and it requires special nutrition.

When fresh water enters the dirty water in a canal it also gets dirty for a while, but later on more and more of the fresh water makes the whole water clean. Similarly, the present good eating habits ward off the former effects of meat-eating.

History is full of instances of great sages who were of lower birth and had evil habits to begin with.

In the case of wise men the change of mind occurs faster than that of the body.

We have the supreme example of Vaalmeeki to disprove the theory of noble birth for noble deeds and effects.

And note what God Himself has to say to Mother Earth in the Varaaha Puraanam :

Mat-bhaktam śvapacham vaa api nindaam kurvanti ye naraah
Padma-koṭi-śatena api na kshamaami, Vasundhare !

(I will not forgive the man who censures any of My devotees — even if he were an outcaste).

—

SECRET OF BIRTH

Question : A friend of mine was born into a meat-eating family. After a while he realised that non-vegetarianism was a sinful habit and he gave it up. He began eating the easily available and highly beneficial vegetarian food. Slowly he started developing a devotional spirit. Seeing this, his father was angry with him and asked him to go back to his old ways. On the son's refusing, the father told the lady of the house that he was not sure of her fidelity because she gave birth to a child who does not follow in his father's footsteps, and threatened her that unless she could make the son abandon his vegetarianism he would kill her. Now my friend is in a dilemma, because the mother asked him to obey his father to save her life and at the same time he does not want to go back to his old evil way of life. What should he do, sir ?

Answer : This is also a good question, and the answer will be of public interest.

In this connection we have to distinguish between 'Jeeva' (ego or the individual self) and 'deha' (physical body).

The father is an unwise man, for he seems to think that the body is the same thing as the soul. One must abide by Dharma (righteousness and dutifulness) and refuse to obey not only one's parents but even one's teachers and the titular deity if they ask him to follow Adharma (impropriety and evil way of life).

If the parents are worth the name they should always wish well by their children. The best illustration of this is Prahlaada who disobeyed his father and his teacher, who came in the way of his devotion to Lord Vishnu. Vibheeshana did not mind the extinction of his own people when he had to help Raama kill his unjust brother Raavana.

The only duty of the children is to serve their parents in their old age or otherwise to help them lead a happy and carefree life. Unlike the seed and the tree, the human birth is determined by the actions of each individual being. While the physical features of the children follow the pattern of their parents, their mental and

spiritual aspects are of their own making—as these non-physical characteristics belong to the individual ego and not to the physical entity.

Lord Krishna says :

Dehinah asmin yathaa dehe kaumaaram yauvanam tathaa
Tathaa deha-antara-praaptih dheerah tatra na muhyati

(While the individual self remains the same in this birth or the next, the body undergoes constant changes from childhood to youth and finally to another existence after death. The wise man who realises this does not bother about the bodily functions).

That the individual self or ego is different from the body is clear to the meanest intelligence. Your friend's father will not really kill your friend's mother. It is only a threat to see your friend accede to his wishes. Or the father might be fearing that his son might take to 'Sannyaasa' (life of renunciation), thereby having none to take care of the former in his old age.

Man is a part of his parental heritage, only from the physical angle; mentally and spiritually, he inherits the effects of his own former deeds - good as well as bad. So man has no spiritual responsibility of discharging filial debt, with the exception of ritual duties.

Isn't it foolish to brand the mother as a woman of loose character, just because the children she gives birth to are of different features and characters ?

Unlike the trees, men act consciously and have to enjoy or suffer the effects of their acts in several births till the monsitic self-realisation occurs to them which results in rebirthlessness.

One must discharge one's sanctioned duty to one's parents; at the same time one need not obey them if they insist on his doing something which goes against his higher loyalty to his real Self — which is God.

With this sole proviso, you must always serve your mother (and father) as though they were a living God (dess) :

Bhoo-pradakshiṇa-shaṭkena Kaaśee-yaatraa-ayutena cha
Setu-snaana-śataih yat cha tat phalam maatṛ-vandane

(By bowing to the feet of the mother, you get the equal of the pious benefit you derive from going round the world six times, from visiting Varanasi a billion times and from taking a dip in the sea at Rameswaram a hundred times).

MERE LEARNING NOT ENOUGH FOR SALVATION

Question : Some pundits threaten the laymen by saying that unless one has sacred-book-learning, one cannot gain Liberation. Is it true, esteemed sir ?

Answer : Of course, for the noble-minded people, book-knowledge is to a certain extent helpful. But to the vain men it can be harmful.

The only important thing in gaining liberation is true knowledge, whether you get it through books or through personal experience and Yogic practice.

If one were to say that familiarity with scriptures is a sine qua non for Salvation, one might as well say that a knowledge of medical science is needed to derive the benefit from medical drugs.

Or you might even say that those who study medicine would be cured of their diseases even without taking any curative drug !

To cure the disease of ignorance is needed the dedication to God-consciousness and to personal self-restraint. If by reading books one were to gain Deliverance, why do not all the devotees of Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva, et al., at once become as great ralised souls as their masters ?

Besides, 'vidyaa' does not mean book-education but self-realisation, as the Lord puts it "Adhyaatma-vidyaa vidyaanaam" (I am self-reallsation among the various studies) —, any more than can mere literacy be education (for one can be *educated*, say, in carpentry, without being *literate*).

Anekaani cha śaastraaṇi swalpa-aayuh vighna-koṭayah
Tasmaat saaram vijaaneeyaat hamsah ksheeram iva ambhasi

(Innumerable are the sciences, limited is man's life-span and countless are the obstacles. So one must cull the essence of all knowledge in the manner of the swan which is said to separate milk from water in watery milk).

The way to the culling of the essence of all knowledge is through the guidance of a good teacher.

Here is the symbolic narration of the plight of sage Naarada before he gathered the essence of self-knowledge from Sanat-kumaara.

Adheetya chaturah Vedaan dharma-śaastraaṇi anekaśah
Brahma-tattvam na jaanaati darvee paaka-rasam yathaa

(Just as the spoon cannot taste the food it serves, so also cannot a man gain God-knowledge by merely learning the four Vedas and all the sacred books).

Bahu śaastra kathaa kanthaa romanthena vrithaa eva kim
Anveshtavyam prayatnena tattvajnah jyotih aantaram

(What is the use of merely getting by rote the massive verbiage of many sciences ? The man of wisdom must with great effort seek the light of God within his own Higher Self).

Sah Puraaṇaan pancha Vedaan śaastraaṇi vividhaani cha
Jnaatvaa api anaatmavit tena Naaradah ati śuśocha ha

(Naarada had learnt the five Vedas and various sciences, but since he had not yet realised his real Self, he was much distressed).

In the Chhaandogya Upanishat we read this in full. Naarada's plaint is "Mantravit eva asmi, na Aatmavit" (I have only learent the scriptures but not the Self), upon which Sanat-kumaara teaches him about the all-pervasive 'Bhoomaa' or the Universal Self, by realising which the man of knowledge is freed from distress ('tarati sokam Aatmavit').

Veda-abhyaasaat puraa taapa-traya-maatreṇa śokitah
Paśchaat tu abhyaasa-vismaara-bhanga-garvaih cha śokitah

(He was attacked by the grief emerging from the personal, natural and divine elements — before he learnt the Vedas; after he learnt the Vedas he was attacked by the trouble of getting by heart the scriptures, by often forgetting what he memorised, by the awareness of a superior intellect in a fellow-student, and by his own learning).

So you see it is not much learning but a little true knowledge of the transcendent nature that makes one a man fit for Liberation.

The foregoing clarification was from *Vedaanta Panchadaśi*. Here is what *Viveka-Choodaamaṇi* has to say :

Avijnaate pare tattve śaastra-adheetih niṣphalaa
Vijnaate api pare tattve śaastra-adheetih tu nishphalaa

(Without gaining the transcendent self-knowledge, one finds that the study of scriptures is fruitless; one also finds the study of scriptures fruitless, if one realised the Supreme Self).

Some realised souls may not be able to explain their transcendental self-awareness in God. But by that reason they must not be discredited, any more than a dumb person who enjoys the taste of good food cannot be said to know its taste, because he cannot put his experience into words.

Anya-vidyaa-parijnaanam avaśyam naśvaram bhavet
Brahma-vidyaa-parijnaanam Brahma-praapti-karam bhavet

(Only the experiencing of God-consciousness leads to the eternal bliss of God-realisation; all other knowledge is merely transitory).

Idam jnaanam idam jneyam tat sarvam jnaatum icchati
Api varsha-sahasra-aayuh śāstra-antam na adhigacchati

(If you want to learn the subject and the object of all that should be known, you will not be able to fulfil your wish even if you live a thousand years).

The idea of Lord Krishna, in this 'Uttara Geetaa' teaching of his, is that one should concentrate only on knowing God and that one should not brother about reading too many books for that purpose.

Vijneyah Aksharah Sat-maatrah jeevitam cha api chanchalam
Vihaaya sarva-śaastraaṇi yat satyam tat upaasitavyam

(Since life is fleetingly impermanent, one must leave aside the many sciences available on earth and should instead try to experience the awareness of the deathless, ever-existent Self).

Vishaya-aaśaa mahaa-paaśa-aadyah vimuktah su-dustyajā
Sah eva kalpate muktyai na anyah shaṭ-śaastra-vedee apih

(Only the man who is freed from the hard-to-abandon bonds and desires of the senses is eligible for liberation — none else, even if he were well-versed in all the six sacred sciences).

Let Bhartrihari define true Education :

Vidyaa naama narasya roopam adhikam pracchanna-guptam dhanam
Vidyaa bhoga-karee yaśah sukha-karee Vidyaa guroonaam guruh
Vidyaa bandhujanah videśa-gamane Vidyaa paraa devataa
Vidyaa raajasu poojyate na hi dhanam Vidyaa-viheenah paśuh

(Education is man's highest comeliness; latent wealth; comforter, giver of fame and pleasure; teacher of teachers; relative in a foreign clime; supreme deity; herald of honour in kingly courts – but not wordly riches. Indeed, the man without Education is the equal of a beast).

Grantham abhyasya medhaavee jnaana-vijnaana-tatparah
Palaalam iva dhaanya-arthee tyajet grantham aśeshatah

(Just as the man seeking the grain rejects the husk, so also should the man of wisdom, learning all that should be learnt in a book, leave that book completely).

The idea is, if one were to stick to the book too long, one would be preoccupied with mere learning, and would be unable to live in God-consciousness all the time.

Ulkaa-hastah yathaa kaśchit dravyam aalokya taam tyajet
Jnaanena Jneyam aalokya Jnaanam paśchaat parityajet

(Like the man who leaves aside the torch that helped him find the thing he looks for in darkness, so too should the man of knowledge let his 'knowledge' alone, once he gains the understanding the of 'Object of 'knowledge' through that knowledge).

Naavaarthee hi bhavet taavat yaavat paaram na gacchati
Utteerṇe tu sarit-paare naavaa kim va prayojanam ?

(The man who wishes to cross the river looks for a ferry only before he does not go to the other side – not afterwards).

That is too say, one has the need for a book only till one gains knowledge, not later. The books themselves are needed only for some people – not all.

DIGEST OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Now, dear seeker, let me clarify how men of knowledge need to observe the rules and regulations of righteous living.

Ut-śaastram śaastritam cha iti dwi-vidham paurusham smṛttam
Tatra ut-śaastram anarthaaya paramaarthaaya śaastritam

(Human endeavour is evident in two ways : the scriptural or god-ordained, and the mundane or independently material, of these the former is conducive to Salvation and the latter leads o ailure.)

That was the teaching of Sage Vasishtha to Lord Raama.

Here is what Lord Krishna tells Arjuna :

Yah śaastra-vidhim utsṛjya vartate kaama-kaaratah
Na sah siddhim avaapnoti na sukaam na paraam gatim

(He who acts, without regard to the scriptural injunctions, would never attain the true goal of life, he has no way of gaining wordly joy or supreme Bliss).

Sarve 'Brahma' vadishyanti sampraapte tu Kalau Yuge
Na anutishṭhanti, Maitreya !, śiśna-udara-paraayaṇaah

(When the age of Kali dawns, every one utters 'God' but these men and women whose chief concern is sex and food, never really live in the ways of God), says sage Paraasara to Maitreya.

Sukham icchanti ye mooḍhaah na icchanti sukha-kaaraṇam
Na icchanti duhkha-leśam vaa tat hetch satatam yataah

(Foolish men want happiness, but they never find out the true source of happiness, they do not want even a bit of sadness, and yet always indulge, wilfully, in the deeds that cause distress).

So says 'Yoga Vaasishtham'.

Puṇyasya phalam icchanti puṇyam na icchanti maanavaah
Na paapa-phalam icchanti paapam kurvanti yatnatah

(Men in general desire the benefit of virtuous deeds but seldom act virtuously, they do not want to suffer the punishment for sins, and yet knowingly commit sin).

Bodhaat oordhwam cha tat dhyeyam jeevat-mukti prasiddhaye
Kaama-aadi kleśa-bandhena yuktasya na hi muktataa

(Even after gaining Self-knowledge, the person seeking liberation while alive -- *jeevanmukti* must still keep meditating on the Universel Self, because if one were to take interest in the bonds of worldly cravings, one has no chance of salvation), says Vidyaaraṇya Swaami in his book 'Panchadasi'.

Śuddha-adwaita-eka-tattvasya yatha-ishṭa-aacharaṇam yadi
Śunaam tattva-dṛśaam cha eva kah bhedah aśuchi-bhakshaṇe

(If a man who masters monistic knowledge would still behave recklessly, and eats indiscriminately, what difference is there between him and the stray dog that goes about licentiously and eats all sorts of refuse?).

So queries Suresvaraachaarya in his 'Vedaanta vaartikam'.

Titikshaa-jnaana-vairaagya-śama-aadi guṇa-varjitah
Bhikshaa-maatreṇa yah jeevet sah paapee yati-vṛttihaa

(The untutored mendicant, who simply lives on charity, and who has none of the virtues of forbearance, wisdom, detachment, self-restraint, etc., is inedeed a blot on the institution of asceticism).

So decries 'Upanishat-Vaanee'.

Yadaa manasi vairaagyam jaatam sarveshu vastushu
Tadaa eva sannyaset vidvaan anyathaa patitah bhavet

(The moment a man is disenchanted wilh the worldly things he should renounce the world, otherwise even the scholar, who still remains in mundane attachment, would court ruin).

That was the voice of 'Aatma-bodha Upanishat'.

Vaasanaayaah tathaa vahneh ṛṇa-vyaadhi-dwishaam api
Sneha-vaira-vishaanaam cha śeshah swalpah api baadhata

(Even a littte residue of sensual craving, fire, debt, disease, having enemies, friendship, enmity and poison, causes distress or enslaving attachment).

Aavrittih asakrit upadesaat

(Until the final detachment dawns on the seeker he should constantly practice Yoga and meditate on God), says sage yaasa in his'Brahma Sootram',

Swa-śareere swayam-jyotih swa-roopam sarva-saakshiṇam
Ksheeṇa-doshaah prapaśyanti na itare maayayaa vṛtaah

(The pure at heart perceive the Eternal Spirit in their own entities, as the self-effulgent, self-existent and all witnessing Supreme Self — but not the others, whose minds are clouded by the illusion of changing reality, which is Maayaa).

Avaasanatvaat satatam yadaa na manute manah
Amanaskaa tadaa udeti parama-upaśama-pradaa

(When the mind does not at all dwell on the worldly attractions, then it achieves the blissfully peaceful state of supermentality in which the sensuous mind does not function)

This state of supermind is what the Raaja Yogis call "Achala" or "Amanaska". The foregoing quotation was from Poorna Upanishat.

The following is from Muktika Upanishat.

Janma-antara-śata-abhyastaa mithyaa samsaara-vaasnaa
Saa dina-abhyaasa-yogena vinaa na ksheeyate kwachit

(The self-deluding 'smell' of the hundred-birth legacy of 'samsaara' does not go away, unless one daily practises Yoga).

Now you can see the falsity of the opinion of the modern Raaja Yogis who maintain that 'amanaska' is enough and that there is no need for 'taaraka' and 'saankhya' practices of Yoga

Brahma-aanande nimagnasya vishaya-aaśaa na tat bhavet
Visham drshtvaa amrtam drshtvaa visham tyajati buddhimaan

(Just as a man would choose ambrosia, when he has the choice between ambroasia and poison, so also would a man endowed with Self-Knowledge reject the worldly lure), says Aatma-bodha Upanishat.

Sage Vyaasa laments:

Oordhva-baahuh vadaami eshah na kaśchit śrnoti maam
Dharmaat arthah cha kaamah cha sah dharmah kim na sevyate ?

(I shout at the top of my voice, raising my hands, but none seems to listen to me : "By following the righteous code of *Dharma*, one can also gain the benefits of Wealth and of just Desire". Oh, why then, does none abide by Dharma ?).

Yathaa nirindhanah vahnih swayam evā upaśaamyati
Tathaa vrtti-kshayaat chittam swayam eva upaśaamyati

(Just as the fuel-less fire would extinguish itself, so too does the mind, not attracted by the early attachments, cease to function materially).

That is, when the mind does not concentrate on material things, it is one with its spiritual consciousness.

Ankuśena vinaa mattah yathaa dushta-matam gajah
Vijetum śakyate na eva tathaa yuktyaa vinaa manah

(Just as the wild elephant cannot be subdued with out the aid of the elephant-driver's hook so also cannot the mind be vanquished without the wisdom gained from Yogic theory and practice).

Uttamaam vrittim aaśritya neecha-vrtti samaaśritah
Aaroodha-patitah jneyah sarva-karma-bahishkrtah

(He who goes back to his former evil ways, even after obtaining the highest wisdom, may be known as someone who climbs the ladder only to fall down from the topmost rung and who is an outcast in the realm of good works).

Indriyaanaam vicharataam vishayeshu swabhaavatah
Balaat aaharanam teshaam Pratyaahaarah sah uchyate

('Pratyaahaara' is that which enables the Yogic practitioner to restrain his senses from following their natural impulses).

Sage Ashtaavakra instructs King Janaka thus :

Ekah viśuddha-bodhah aham iti niśchaya-vahninaa
Prajvaalya ajnaana-gahanam veeta-śokah sukhee bhava

(Be supremely happy by burning the jungle of ignorance with the fire of determined awareness that you are one with the one and only awakened Supreme Self)

Yaavat na adhigatam jneyam yaavat ksheenaa na chitta-bhooh
Yaavat teernah na samsaarah taavat nah kuśalam kutah ?

(How can we ever claim real safety, until we perceive the object of all knowledge, destroy the waverings of the mind and cross the sea of 'samsaara' ?).

Śaastra-arthaih budhyate na aatmaa guroh vachanatah na cha
Budhyate swayam eva eshah swa-bodha-vaśatah swayam

(None can really realise one's real Self with the aid of scriptures or of teachers but only by means of one's own transcendent experiencing of the supreme Spirit through meditation and non-dual devotion).

Muktih tu Brahmanah tattva-jnāt eva asya na anyathaa
Swa-prabodham vinaa na eva swa-swapnah heeyate katham ?

(Even as the fear of the nightmare is gone on one's own waking up, so also would the release from the fear of 'samsaara' come with one's being awake to one's own inner God-consciousness).

Asti Brahmaa iti chet veda paroksha-jnaanam eva tat
Aham Brahmaa iti chet veda saakshaatkaarah sah uchyate

(As long as one conceives God as an entity existing outside of oneself, one's knowledge is only secondhand. But once one realises that one's individual self is part and parcel of the Universal Self, such knowledge of God is direct Self-knowledge or God-realisation).

Knowledge about God is like learning about the disease and getting the prescription for its cure, but realising God within one's own inner self is like actually taking the drug for the cure. Is it not strange that today's false prophets think that they realise God by merely hearing about Him ?

Sage Yaajnavalkya tells his wife, Maitreyi :

Aatmaa vaa are drashtavyah srotavyah mantavyah nididhyaasitavyah (One must realise the world as a manifestation of the Supreme Self ; then one must start realising. It by hearing about It ; then by thinking over It ; and finally by meditating on It as the Macrocosm of one's individual microcosm).

Without such self-identity with God there is no salvation.

The Upanishat says :

Tam evam viditvaa ati-mrityum eti na anyah panthaa vidyate ayanaaya (Only by thus knowing non-dually the all-pervasive God can one cross the eternal fear of life and death ; there is no other way to Salvation than to experience God within one's inmost self).

And listen to what makes a real sage :

Maunaat na munih bhavati na araṇya-vasanaat munih
Sat-lakshaṇam tu yah veda sah munih śreshṭhah uchyate

(Not by maintaining silence nor by dwelling in a forest does one become a seer. He is a great sage who knows within himself the nature of God's truth and existence).

The Maitreyi Upanishat continues :

Ekam eva adwiteeyam yat guroh vaakyena niśchitam
Etat ekaantam iti uktam na maṭhah na vana-antaram

(The real *'ekaanta'* or self-realising solitude is to be aware of the 'One without a second', the supreme Spirit, through the teaching of a preceptor, but not living in a monastery or a forest).

Similarly it is not by the externals, like smearing of the ash or of the wearing of the saffron robe, should you judge a 'sannyaasin' but by his ability to take the rough with the smooth and to lead the world to God-realisation by first realising God himself.

Yathaa agaatha-nidheh laabhe na upaayah khananam vinaa
Mat-laabhe api tathaa swa-aatma-chintaam muktvaa na cha aparah

(You cannot get at the treasure hidden underground, without digging for it. Likewise, you cannot know God, without meditating on the supreme inner self that is embedded within the inmost consciousness of man).

So said the 'Aatma Geetaa'.

Vidyaaranya Swaami says :

Vichaaritam alam śaastram chiram udgaahitam mithah
Santyakta-vaasanaat maunaat ṛte na asti uttamam padam

(We have long discussed the intricacies of scriptures. Now we realise that the best step is for the mind to leave the 'smells' of its craving for sensual pleasures, and silently meditate upon the Absolute).

The law-giver, Manu, says :

Tapasaa praapyate sattvam sattvaat sampraapyate manah
Manasaa praapyate hi Aatmaa Aatmanaa na nivartate

(By means of penance one begets the noble effect of physical strength ; from the physical good effect come the strength of mind ; from such a trained and well-regulated mental function arises the true perception of the inner Self ; from such Self-knowedge comes the Liberation from 'samsaara' for ever).

When it is said that the Self cannot be understood by either speech or mind, it is meant that mere words and the untutored

mind cannot discern it. However, the words which enable one to realise Brahman, and the mind which is well-trained by consecration and devotion can see that the multiplicity of forms is not real but that the One and only Atman (manasaa eva idam aaptavyam na iha naanaa asti kinchana; is solely and sempiternally real.

The right kind of penance is :

Manasah cha indriyaaṇaam cha aikaagryam paramam tapah
Tat jyayah sarva dharmebyah sah dharmah parah uchyate

(The greatest penance is the concentration on God, by controlling both the mind and the sense-organs. This is the best of all sacred practices and is indeed called the Highest Duty).

A popular verse puts it :

Para-upadeśe paanḍityam sarveshaam sukaram nriṇaam
Dharme swakeeye anushṭhaanam kasyachit tu mahaatmanah

(It is easy for men to display scholarship in advising others. But it is given only to the great men to practise what they preach)'

If you do not examine the reality about your would-be teacher here is the danger :

Andhena eva cha yathaa andhaah neeyamaanaah su-daaruṇe
Andhaah koope patanti eva tathaa paapa-rataah janaah

(Just as the blind led by the blind fall into ruts and pits, so also are the people led by the sinful men).

If your teacher is a sinner you are likely to be one yourself.

The great souls who experience transcendent bliss never find the contact with worldly joys tasteful. Besides, there is no relaxation from certain fundamental characteristics and duties even for the Jeevanmuktas.

Ahimasā satyam asteyam a-kaama-krodha-lobhatā
Bhūta-priya-hita eehaa cha Dharmah ayam sārva-varṇikah

(Common to all castes and classes of people are these indispensable qualities of Duty or Dharma : non-violence ; truthfulness ; non-stealing ; absence of lust, wrath and greed).

All seekers and liberated souls alike must possess these virtues.

Vidyaaranya Swaami clarifies :

Brahma-loka-tṛṇeekaarah vairaagyasya avadhih matah
Deha-aatmavat para-aatmatva-daarḍhye bodhaḥ samaapyate

(Only when the seeker is able to reject the joys, including those of even the highest realm of Brahman*, can he be sure that he is fully detached ; and only when one is completely free from the identification of one's consciousness with the body and when it is fully merged in the Absolute can he stop his study and search concerning God).

Sage Suka cautions :

Kim vidyayaa kim tapasaa kim tyaagena śrutena vaa
Kim viviktena maunena streebhih yasya manah hritam

(If man does not conquer his craving for women, what is the use of his learning, penance, sacrifice, scriptural study, solitary living and silence ?).

In the case of women seekers, the words, 'woman', 'her' and 'men', must respectively replace 'man' 'his' and 'women' in the foregoing verse. But of course, the sexual activity meant for the preservation and the propagation of the species is never forbidden. Only promiscuity in the case of householders, and the very desire in the case of the seekers, are said to be undesirable.

Samsaara-deergha-rogasya su-vichaarah ayam aushadham
Kah aham kasya cha samsaarah vivekena vileeyate

* 'Brahma-loka' is distinct from 'Brahma-jnaana' : the former refers to a place of resort, and the latter to the essential understanding of the individual's unity with the Universal.

(The best medicine for the chronic disease of 'samsaara' is to think for oneself about "Whom am I ?" and "Whose is this 'samsaara' ?", and then to distinguish between the real 'I' and the unreal identification of oneself and one's interests with the physical body and the external world).

In order to reach this stage of distinguishing between the real Self and the unreal body, both the teacher and the student must have the right attitude of mind.

Jnaanam pratyaksham eva idam guru-śishya prayojanam
Ubhau api yatah yogyau sarveshaam eedrśaam api

(In order that the self-evident Knowledge might be also evident to both the preceptor and the disciple, the two must possess the proper qualifications of self-restraint and selfless search for Truth).

Śishya-prajnaa eva bodhasya kaaranam guru-vaakyatah
Mala-trayam apakvam chet katham budhyati pakva-vat ?

(In order to make out the instruction of the teacher, the pupil's innate intellect is essential, for how could the ripe knowledge spring up from the unripe mind which is covered with the three weeds of ignorance, delusion and impurity ?).

Then there is the difference in the approach to self-realisation.

Asaadhyah kasyachit Yogah kasyachit Jnaana-niśchayah
Prakaarau dvau tatah Devah jagaada Parameśwarah

(To some the way of Yoga is not accessible; to others that of Knowledge. Therefore the Lord God advised one of these two courses to Salvation, and the seeker can choose between them).

As long as one sincerely and seriously practises one's chosen path to Liberation, the means is immaterial because the goal is the same to all true devotees.

But of course, detachment from worldly attachments is a prerequisite to all ways to Salvation.

Samprabodhavatee teekshnaa kalanka-rahitā matih
Sarva saamagri-aheenaa api Padam aasaadayati alam

(As long as one's mind is awake to godliness, sharply aware of the soul and free from impure superimpositions, it leads to the Supreme Beatitude – no matter it has no other external practices to its credit).

On the other hand, sensual detachment is never to be compromised,

Smrtvaa api śuddha chaitanyam aatmaanam ati-sundaram
Upasthe atyanta-samsaktah maalinyam adhigacchati

(Even though one is aware of the endlessly beautiful greatness of the Pure Consciousness of the Supreme Self, all such awareness is easily contaminated by the addiction to sexual activity).

Anyathaa santam aatmaanam yah anyathaa pratipadyate
Kim na tena krtam paapam chorena aatma-apahaarinaa

(Pretending to be self-realising saints and trying to behave as they please, the false prophets are worse than the common criminals).

I am sure you now know all that should really be known about the real Yogis and about the fake "Raaja Yogis".

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SALVATION HERE & NOW

Kuśalaah Brahma-vaartaayaam vṛtti-heenaah su-raagiṇah
Te api ajnaanatayaa noonam punah aayaanti yaanti cha

(They who are well-versed in talking about God, but are at the same time immersed in sensual attachments, would definitely enter the vicious circle of life and death again and again).

Yeshaam vṛttih samaavṛddhaa paripakvaa cha saa punah
Te vai Sat-Brahmataam praaptāh na itare brahmachaariṇah

(Only those people whose mentality has mastered equanimity and steadiness in conceiving the supramental perfection can attain to the Absolute, but not the pseudo-celibates who take pride in their verbal learning).

Ye hi vṛttim vihaaya enaam Brahma-aakhyaam paavaneem paraam
Vrithaa eva te tu jeevanti paśubhih cha samaah naraah

(They who live without being aware of the supreme, perfect godhead, live in vain and may be called the equals of beasts).

So said Sankaraachaarya in 'Aparoksha-anubhooti'.

Yathaa bharjita-beejasya prarohitvam vinaśyati
Tathaa Aatma-jnaaninah nityam jagat-buddhih vileeyate

(Even as a burnt seed is not capable of growing, if planted, so also is the worldly attention of the man of knowledge resistant to worldliness).

The fake philosophers who take advantage of the saying that the man of knowledge is never bound by the effect of his action do not distinguish between actually doing a 'wrong thing and not being affected by wrong things'. The point is, the wise man or 'Raaja Yogi' or 'Jeevanmukta', even when in the midst of women bof loose character, is not sensually affected — which does not mean that he can indulge his sensual passion with impunity, just because he is a realised soul.

The women followers have specially to be careful in this respect when they listen to the words of their self-styled "Raaja Yogi Gurus". For, it is one thing to be unmoved by the lures of the senses; another to say that, since the soul is not affected by the body, the body can be put to any and every kind of abuse.

Yena labdhah adwayah cha Aatmaa tasya bhoga-ratih kutah ?
Tat-Brahmā aham iti jnaatvaa deenataam sah kim aavahet ?

(He who gained the identity with the non-dual Atman would never take pleasure in physical luxury. Indeed, how would one who tells oneself 'I am one with God' ever again stoop to the mean sensual activity ?).

So said 'Vichaara-maalaa'.

Sage Ashtaavakra teaches King Janaka :

Yatra yatra bhavet tṛshṇaa samsaaram viddhi tatra vai
Prauḍha-vairaagyam aaśritya veeta-tṛshṇah sukhee bhava

(Wherever desire flourishes there reigns 'samsaara' supreme. So, embracing mature detachment from the senses, be endlessly happy).

The modern 'Raaja Yogi's who live in worldly ways cite the example of King Janaka to support their mundane attachments. In point of fact, King Janaka acted only for the good of his people, whereas these charlatans only have their personal comfort in mind when they preach that a man of knowledge is not bound by his actions. Indeed, the difference between the sage-king and these puny men is that between an elephant and a mosquito.

The Gita asserts :

Bhoga-aiśwarya-prasaktaanaam tayaa apahrita chetasaam
Vyavasaaya-aatmikaa buddhih samaadhau na vidheeyate

Tyaja durjana- samsargam bhaja saadhu-samaagamam
Kuru punyam aho-raatram smara nityam anityataam

(Forsake the company of bad men; seek the society of the saintly people; do good to others all the time; and never be unmindful of the non-eternal, so that you can always meditate on the Real).

Well, you have now learnt what should and should not be done in your search for self-identity. If you abide by this learning, you realise Salvation in this very life.

COMPASSION FOR ALL CREATION

The 'Naarayana Smriti' maintains that the man who is fond of liquor is a friend in human shape ("Madya-paana-ratah daityah", and that the man who eats the food that comes of killing a fellow-creature is the very demon (Maamasa-asee cha nisaacharah)

When God has given man equally nutritious food, by way of fruits and roots, vegetables and holy waters, what a pity that even some of our 'Raaja Yogis' insist on being served non-vegetarian dishes :

Even Yogi Vemana, who has no use for the superstitious practices, condemns the meat-eaters as wolves in men's shape.

Don't these non-vegetarians realise that just as their life is dear to them, so is theirs to the creatures whom they eat?

Praanaah yathaa aatmanah abheeshtaah bhootaanaam api te tathaa
Aatma-aupamyena bhootaaanaam dayaam kurvanti saadhavah

(The good men show mercy to all fellow–creatures and treat them like themselves, for they know that even as their life is dear to them so is it to the other living beings).

Maamsa-bhakshaih suraa-paanaih moorkhaih cha akshara-varjitah
Paśubhih purusha-aakaaraih bhaara-aakraantaa asti medinee

(Mother Earth is unbearably burdened by the two-legged foolish human beasts who eat meat, drink liquor and have no learning),

Aatmavat sarva-bhooteshu kaayena manasaa giraa
Anukampaa dayaa saa eva proktaa Yoga-anga-vedibhih

(The fellow-feeling one has for one's fellow-beings, as for oneself, is called the real Mercy by the Yogis).

The Lord Creator, Brahma, says in *Brahma Geetaa:*

Parama-advaita-vijnaana-nishṭhasya eva mahaatmanah
Śuśrooshaa kriyate yena tat-paadau mama mastake

(Verily I bear on my head with reverence the feet of those men who give nourishment to the sages that have identified themselves with the Absolute).

So piety and charity must be offered with proper care, and only to the deserving sages and the worthy poor.

ON SERVING THE SAGES

Na tapaamsi na teerthaaṇi na śaastraaṇi na vaa japaah
Samsaara-saagara-uttaare sat-jana-aasevanam vinaa

(Neither penance nor pilgrimage, neither scripture nor prayer, helps a man cross the sea of 'samsaara' without the service to the Holy Men), opines sage Vasishtha.

Of course, it is not the mere feeling that matters, but the company of the good men, and the wise words one has a chance of hearing from the holy man to whom one offers hospitality.

And when the mind of the host is purified by his service to the holy man, see what great benefit he derives:

Kulam pavitram jananee kṛtaarthaa viśwambharaa puṇya-vatee cha tena
Apaara samvit sukha saagare asmin leenam Pare Brahmaṇi yasya chetah

(He, whose mind is submerged in the endlessly blissful consciousness of the Supracosmic Spirit, sanctifies his clan, gratifies his mother, and makes the wide earth feel ennobled).

So says Lord Krishna in 'Bhaagavatam'.

The 'Vichaaramaalaa' asseverates:

Sugotrah yah dwijah yajnaan kritvaa aaste yat phalam labhet
Gacchatah Saadhu-saannidhyam tat phalam syaat pade pade

(Each step that leads one to a holy man provides him with as much virtuous effect as is derived by the noble Brahmin who performs a sacrificial rite properly).

Sat-sanga-Kalpa-vṛkshah asau sarva-abheeshṭa phala-pradah
Su-vaakya-amrita-varsheṇa treen taapaan harate kshaṇaat

(The munificent divine tree of good company offers one all the good things one desires. The ambrosial stream of the holy

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men's wise words quench the three fiery troubles man suffers from the physical, elemental and divine sources).

Indeed, any person who calls at one's residence must be looked upon as a visiting God, as the following verse suggests:

Uttamasya api varṇasya neechah api griham aagatah
Poojaneeyah yathaa-yogyam sarva-deva-mayah atithih

Therefore it is all the more reason why you should serve the holy men as the living gods walking the earth.

DEVOTION TO GOD

The 'Soota Samhitaa' says :

Satyam satyam punah satyam uddhritya bhujam uchyate
Prasaadaat eva sarveshaam sarva-siddhih Mahesituh

(Raising my hands high, I declare the supreme truth: "It is only by deserving the grace of God that one can obtain the desired bliss or fruit of good works").

Vṛkshasya moola-sekena śaakhaah pushyanti yathaa
Śiva-dhyaanena devaah cha tathaa tṛptaah bhavanti hi

(In the same manner as the branches of a tree put forth fresh leaves, if its roots are well watered, the prayers offered to the universal God would reach the presiding deities of the various sources of cosmic existence).

That it is not book-learning but sincere devotion that enables one to realise God is made clear by these two verses :

Chatuh-Veda-artha-tattvajnaah chatuh-śaastra-viśaaradaah
Yajna-daana-tapah-nishthaah na Me roopam vidanti te

(By the mere study of the Vedas or by the mastery of all the sacred books and worldly sciences or by performing sacrifices, charities and penances, none can realise God— if they lack devotion to Him).

Sarva-bhooteshu kaaruṇyam priya-bhaashaṇam eva cha
Sarva-bhoota-hite śraddhaa saakshaat Bhaktih Śivasya tu

(The direct devotion to God is nothing but compassion for all living creatures, speaking endearingly to all fellow-men and showing active interest in doing good to all living beings).

Now it must be clear to you that God is one, that all prayers to the various deities reach one and the same God, and that it is not material practices but service to all living creatures that marks true devotion to God.

GOS IS ONE

The Rig and the Atharva Vedas declare: "Ekam Sat, vipraah bahudhaa vadanti" (The Godly Existence is but one, albeit the various seers define Him variously). So, to say that "your God is not real and that my God is the only real one" does not become a genuine devotee, but makes one a partisan and a fanatic.

Ye namasyanti Govindam te namasyanti Śankaram
Ye archayanti Harim bhaktyā te archayanti Vṛṣadhwajam

(They who worship Vishnu also worship Shiva at the same time, and vice versa).

As already noted in the chapter "Non-difference between Vishnu and Shiva", it is only ignoramuses who think that one must be as strict in praying to one's personal deity as a chaste woman devoted only to her own husband. For, the point is, unlike the different women who have different husbands, there are no different Gods, but there is only one God.

Indeed, they who see various gods are like the blind men who touch the various parts of an elephant and describe the same animal in various ways — none of which is related to the real animal they touch.

Sarva-saakshiṇam Aatmaanam varna-aaśrama-vivarjitam
Brahma-roopatayaa paśyan Brahmaa eva bhavati swayam

(Inasmuch as man's soul is one with the all-pervading spirit of God, the person who sees the Universal Self as the all-witnessing Ultimate Reality, devoid of any distinctions of caste or creed, would himself or herself become God).

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RECITING GOD'S NAME

In order to beget the complete concentration on God, it is essential to recite God's name again and again, in a seculded spot, undisturbed by annoying insects or inquisitive society.

However, the more important thing is to be detached from one's own addiction to one's sensual pleasures.

Indriyaaṇi indriya-arthebhyah pratyaahṛtya manah chalam
Pratyagaatmani samsthaapya dhyaanam kuryaat yatih sadaa

(The hermit should always meditate on God, by diverting the sense-organs from their functions, by concentrating the wavering mind on the Universal Self which is ever-present in the Individual Self).

From meditation on God one progresses towards that trance in which one is in perfect communion with God,

Salile saindhavam yadvat saamyam bhajati Yogatah
Tadaa Aatma-manasoh aikyam 'samaadhih' abhidheeyate

(The trance-like state of self-realisation is the union of the mind and the soul, in which one is not distinct from the other, like the salt melted in water).

Such a trance can be best obtained by way of the silent prayer. This 'Japa' is of three kinds, and 'Japa Yajna' is much better than the material 'vidhi yajna' :

Uttamam maanasam jaapyam upaamśuh madhyamam smṛtam
Adhamam vaachikam praahuh sarva-mantreshu vai Dwijaah

(The best is the mental prayer; the mediocre, the throat-centred one; the lowliest, the vocal one), says the Manu Smriti, following the opinion of those who practised them all.

Therefore, while the community 'Bhajans' are useful to promote fellow-feeling among the devotees, they must not be content with such loud prayers — which often disturb the neighbours, too —, but must try to meditate silently in their own homes, in perfect solitude.

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PHYSICAL ABILITY

Question : Is it not because women are the weaker sex—bodily and mentally—that they were traditionally denied 'Brahma Vidyaa', (study of God), esteemed sir ?

Answer : Nowhere did the sages say that women are unfit to pursue Self-knowledge. It is a calumny put forth by selfish men of later generations, who are responsible for the spiritual degeneration of our country.

In the Vedas we read hymns composed by twenty-seven ladies. In rhe Brihadaaranyaka Upanishat we read the dialogue with sage Yaajnavalkya conducted by two famous saintly women—Gaargi and Maitreyee.

Sankaraachaarya was engaged in an intellectual debate with the wife of Mandana Misra, Ubhaya Bhaarati, even in this Age of Kali.

It is true that one of the synonyms of 'woman' is "abalaa", but that only means that she is comparatively weaker than man—not that she is really weak. This weakness is merely from the physical standpoint. We all know that physical strength is no match for the spiritual and mental one.

The puny man conquers mighty beasts by virtue of his mental superiority.

The great sages and wise men are physically weaker than the manual labourers, as a rule.

Anyway, today we see women taking an equal place with men in all walks of life. Actually, Chaanakya opined that the intellect of women is four times greater than that of men : "Streenaam buddhih chatuh-gunam".

In the Gita, the Lord allotted only one share of His might to ordinary men, kings and sages, but credited women with seven of His qualities :

"Keertih sreeh vaak cha naareenam, smritih medhaa dhritih kshamaa" (Renown, Riches, Vocal Power, Contemplative Cognition, Retentive Mental Power, Physical Fortitude and Forbearance).

And who were in larger number among Lord Krishna's devotees? Men or women ? The answer should belie the view of selfish men who deny God-study (Brahma Vidyaa) to women.

Question : If, revered sir, as you say women are so intellectually superior to men, why is it that today most of them still remain beckward ?

Answer : One is ashamed to confess that there is some truth in this dcubt. But don't you see that the fault is not with the women themselves ? It is only because men have discouraged them for long years that the women could not put their great intellects to good use. Besides, some traditionalists were also guilty of denying scriptural study to certain castes among men, too. The pity is that the very people who claim the authority to study the scriptures do not themselves read them, or, at least, do not interpret them properly.

There can be nothing sillier than saying that an educated woman would invite lovers by writing them letters, because illiteracy is no bar to illicit sex.

'Vidyaa' really connotes 'knowledge', not mere literacy.

History is full of incidents in which women took care of their homes and even their nations, when the men were in no position to shoulder their responsibilities. There is no need to recount them all here, for they are familiar to all intelligent people.

Educated women can curb the *'Raaga'* (wrath or lustful attachment) of their menfolk, and contribute to the peaceful atmosphere of the home. Indeed, the sages say that the home itself is a penance grove, where the men are free from this 'Raaga': "Nivritta–raagasya griham tapo-vanam".

Moreover,

Yeshaam na vidyaa na tapah na daanam
Jnaanam na śeelam na guṇah na dharmah
Te mṛtyu-loke bhuvi bhaarabhootaah
Manushya-roopeṇa mṛgaah charanti

(They who have no education or penance or charity or wisdom or character or virtue or righteousness are a burden to both this world and the other one : indeed, they are animals moving about in human form), says Bhartrihari.

Above all, the 'Soul' is common to all creation. Water stored in various vessels still remains water; so also does the 'Atman' in the different physical manifestations. And then, the theory of rebirth reminds us that a woman in this birth can be a man in the next one, or a man of lower caste can be highborn in another birth. Yet the 'Atman' remains over and above the physical entity.

So none is weak or unfit to learn about a Reality which has nothing to do with physical strength or sex or caste or creed.

The 'Avadhoota Geetaa' says :

Na eva stree na pumaan eshah na eva cha ayam napumsakah
Yat-yat śareeram aadatte tena tena sah yujyate

(The Atman is neither male nor female nor eunuch. It assumes the external form of the person with which It is temporarily associated in creation, all the time remaining aloof in Its essential reality).

That being so, the question of one sex or one caste being inferior or unfit does not at all arise in studying about Atman.

Question : Sir, although I asked you this question formerly, I would still like to seek further clarification on the view that one should not curb the wishes of the 'Atman' — even if It wants to enjoy eating meat or drinking liquor, for instance, — that it is only the Atman that does every thing; and that it is the ignorance of the person that makes him think of himself as the doer. What do you say, sir ?

Answer : This is not the view of the people who believe in the immortal Atman, but of the atheistic 'Chaarvaakas', who believe only in the mortal body.

If one goes by this rule, can an outcast cohabit with a chaste high-born woman, just because he wants to ? If anyone wants the wealth of another, can he simply rob with impunity ?

'Atman' stands for the ever-existing, ever-conscious, ever-blissful Reality, and the mundane wishes belong to the 'Anaatman' of the self-deluding mind and body. The whole study of 'Aatma Vidyaa' is meant for the ability to distinguish between '*Aatmaa*' and '*Anaatmaa*'. '*Akaama*' is the definition of Atman in the scriptures : how can one attribute 'desire' to this *desireless, ever-happy Brahman* who is of the essence of 'Aananda' (Beatitude)?

The desires belong to the sense-organs. The need is to discipline them :

Indriyaaṇi eva tat sarvam yat Swarga-Narakau ubhau
Nigṛheeta-visṛshṭaaṇi Swargaaya Narakaaya cha

(Men's senses are at the root of their going to Heaven or Hell : if they are controlled, they lead to Heaven, and if unchecked to Hell).

Question : Thank you, sir, for your kind clarification. But what about the devotees of Raama, or any other God, who say that, as long as they keep repeating the name of their favourite God, no sin can touch them, and that they are therefore free to act as they please? Are they right in literally interpreting "Japatah na asti paatakam" — that their prayers banish all sins?

Answer : This is also the opinion of the wolves in sheep's clothing.

No doubt, those people who have Yogic powers can do certain things which are not possible for ordinary people. But that does not mean that they act licentiously : the very purpose of Yoga or 'Japa' is to commune with the spirit of God, and not to act sinfully. And if they can really think that they are like fire which burns away all sinful material, let them prove their 'fire-power' by swallowing some fiery object.

The purpose of prayer is self-purification but not wilfull self-contamination. It is foolish to think that prayer could save one from the evil effects of debauchery and the like.

Question : Sir, do you mean that the 'Ṣree Raama Naama Taarakam' (the chanting of the name of Raama to gain Salvation) would not destroy sins?

Answer : Doubtless, the chanting of "Raam Naam" quells the evil effects of the misdeeds of past births — but only if it is recited with adequate devotion, detachment and knowledge. Without such practical good faith, the chanting would only make the reciter more wicked, because he would think that he could behave as he pleases, now that the name of Raama is there to save him from all sins.

Besides, there is the example of the poisonous medicine, which helps only if administered judiciously, on being prescribed by a competent doctor. If indiscriminately self-medicated, the wonder drug would only kill the patient.

Moreover, only those sins which were committed unknowingly would be absolved by the chanting of the name of God. From the purely scientific point of view, we have to understand that all prayer is auto-suggestion and self-purification, for, while chanting the name of God, some of our conception of godliness becomes part of our mental make-up. So any worship of God should accompany strict faith in the goodness of man and the eternity of man's spirit of God-consciousness.

Repentance involves the resolve about no further sinning; by tself repentance does not absolve one of sin.

Kritvaa paapam hi santapya tasmaat paapaat pramuchyate
Na evam kuryaat punah iti nivṛttyaa pooyate tu sah

(If one sincerely repents one's sins one can be saved — but only if one is firmly resolved that one would never again sin), says Manu Smriti. Just as you would get caught sooner or later, if you try to exploit people as an impostor, so would any false

prophet be found out if he indulges in evil acts while professing to be a saint. By taking the name of God in vain such men make their lot worse than ever before.

The 'Bhaagavatam' warns us :

Sangam na kuryaat asataam śiśna-udara-tṛpaam kwachit
Tasya anugaah tamasi andhe patati andha-anuga-andhavat

(Never should you associate yourself with the wicked impostors, whose main concern is only for sex and food, for such bad company makes one's lot comparable to that of the blind being led by the blind).

But you must approach a good and trustworthy teacher, as the Mundaka Upanishat advises,

Tat-vijnaana-artham sat-gurum eva abhigacchet.

Such a teacher would by precept and example teach the disciple, who is tested for his self-restraint and dedication to divine understanding, the truth about the imperishable universal self.

Question : If the sense-organs behave according to their natural functions, what harm do they do to the Soul which is untouched by them?

Answer : To think that the sense-organs behave naturally is a fallacy. It they merely obey their natural instinct, what difference is there between the saint and the sinner — both of whom have the same sense-organs?

Precisely, one should say that the functions of the senses "come and go". While their effect is felt in the state of slavish ignorance, the same is not the case during Liberation.

Take the case of a magnet : it attracts all metallic objects equally. But man is not equally attracted by his contact, say, with his mother, his sister and his wife.

No doubt, certain sense-organs perform their functions naturally — as does the eye when it sees. But then, even as you have the freedom to choose between seeing or not seeing a given thing, you have the freedom to control or give free rein to your senses.

The problem facing the seeker is to turn the outgoing impulse of the senses inwards.

The consciousness of man in the brain receives the impulses from the senses but it can be trained to achieve command over the sensuous messages.

∴ *Śrotram chakshuh sparśanam cha rasanam ghrāṇam eva cha*
Adhishṭhaaya manah cha ayam vishayaan upasevate

(By taking the directions from the mind, the ear, the eye, the touching organ — hand —, the tongue and the nose perform their various functions).

But mind by itself is also non-conscient. The only conscient object is the self, and it is in the mere presence of the omnipresent Self, the mind sends its messages and receives them mechanically.

So man has the responsibility to let his senses act in conformity with the spirit of the Summum Bonum — in order to realise his ultimate liberation and his complete identity with his original, real Self or Soul or Spirit.

—

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Question : Sir, don't you think that it is incumbent on us to follow the practices that have been observed by our ancients through the ages? If in certain traditional observances, like 'Guru Poojaa' (pupil's reverential offering to his teacher), the drinking of liquor and the eating of meat are done, would you consider that such traditions are still wrong? After all, did not the Lord Himself accept tradition thus, in the Gita?

Śreyaan swa-dharmah viguṇah para-dharmaat su-anu-shṭhitaat
Swa-dharme nidhanam śreyah para-dharmah bhayaavahah

(Rather than sedulously practise extraneous religious faiths, even death should be faced by man in observing his own traditional practises, for the best is one's own tradition).

Answer : Well, the word of God is true, but if its interpretation is done by an atheist his goal is nothing but Hell.

And then whom do you mean by 'our ancients'? You mean the men who appeared in the last hundred years or so, or you mean the great ancient seers who were supremely one with God?

Listen to the Lord's voice again :

Maharshayah sapta-poorve cha tvaarahManavah tathaa
Mat-bhāvāh mānasā jātāh yeshaam loke imaah prajāh

(Born of My true nature and conceived by my mind are the seven mighty sages of yore and the four great Manu kings of old — and they are the men who set the correct pattern that should be followed by the rest of the world).

It is the sages who live in the manner of the great seers of the past like Sanaka, and the kings who do good to the populace, that should be taken as your ideal men among the ancients, not the 'Ganja' addicts and their ilk.

'Swadharma' is "swasya dharmah" (the duty enjoined on us by our supreme Self). Therefore, the verse quoted by you really means that one should not do anything which goes against the spiritual injunctions of one's godlike, real nature.

Yukti-yuktam upaadeyam vachanam baalakaat api
Anyat tṛṇam iva tyaajyam api uktam Padma-janmanaa

(One must accept the well established and well-conceived advice of even a child, and must refuse the counsel of even the Lord Creator if it is contrary to the highest good).

Sage Vasishtha told Raama, in the foregoing verse, that the example that should be followed should be of the nature of the greatest good for oneself and for all fellow men.

You should always cultivate the society of good men, in order to know the correct ideas and practices that should be your guiding principles.

I will tell you a story to illustrate this point.

Once two pigeons were caught by a hunter. One of them managed to escape the clutches of the hunter and took refuge in a hermitage, the other one was sold by him to a butcher. While being trained to speak by the butcher, it somehow managed to free itself from the cage and flew away to a wayside tree, where it made its abode.

Once when a pilgrim on his way to Varanasi stopped under the tree to cook his food, he heard the bird's words : "What sort of meat do you want? Pork or beef or mutton or chicken? Pay the correct price on the tag, and take what you want". Terrified by the bird's words, under the impression that it was a frightful ghost, the gentle pilgrim went a little further and started cooking under a tree near the hermitage. There the other little pigeon accosted his thus : "Welcome, sir, I hope you are doing well. May God bless you. Speak the truth, do the right thing, always. God alone is real, the external world is illusory. Non-violence is the highest religion. The greatest distress is to be enmeshed in the activities of 'samsaara'".

And finally remember the famous words of Sankaracharya:

Sat-sangatve nissangatvam nissangtve nirmohatvam
Nirmohatve niśchala tattwam niśchala-tattwe jeevanmuktih

(By keeping good company one gradually acquires detachment; from detachment is derived the absence of delusion; from the absence of delusion is gained the unmovable consciousness of true knowledge; and from the unmovable consciousness of true knowledge stems the state of Salvation, even while alive).

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SEASONS OF DEPARTURE FROM THE EARTH

Question : From the famous words of the Gita springs the fear even in the minds of the realised souls that if they die in the 'Dakshina ayana' (the six months of the southern course of the sun) they may be reborn in the world of 'samsaara'. On the contrary, death during the other six months is believed to yield rebirthlessness. Kindly explain this, sir !

Agnih jyotih ahah śuklah shaṭ-maasaah uttaraayaṇam
Tatra prayaataah gacchanti Brahma Brahma-vidah janaah

(The six months of the sun's northern course represent fire, light, daytime and the bright half of the month; the men of wisdom who depart the earth then attain to the Absolute).

Dhoomah raatrih tathaa kṛshṇah shaṭ-maasaah dakshiṇa-ayanam
Tatra chaandramasam jyotih Yogee praapya nivartate

(The six months of the sun's southern course represent smoke, nighttime and the dark half of the month; therefore the Yogi who then dies returns to the earth in another birth).

Answer : These are symbolic verses and must not be interpreted literally. The time of death is singificant for the thoughts that pass through the mind of the dying person. The northern course of the sun, representing brightness, is figuratively conducive to progressive thought; and the southern course, because of its predominantly wintry darkness, symbolises the thoughts of the ignorant people at the time of their death.

The main thing is the thought that enters the mind of the man at death, and a divine thought does not come spontaneously but only as a result of lifelong devotion and dedication.

And remember the operative word "Brahma-vidah" — men who realise God. That means, not everyone who dies in 'Uttara-ayanam' is assured of rebirthlessness, because we see every day several sinners dying in that half of the year.

Anyway, you must turn to these verses in the same Gita :

Anta-kaale cha Maam eva smaran muktvaa kalebaram
Yah prayaati sah Mat-bhaavam yaati na asti atra samśayah

(If one dies thinking of Me, one is sure of reaching Me).

Yam yam vaa api smaran bhaavam tyajati ante kalebaram
Tam tam eva eti Kaunteya ! sadaa tat-bhaava bhaavitah

(Being always of the same mind, with whatever thoughts a man leaves his body he would attain the next existence in accordance with the same thoughts).

So always keep the thoughts of God in your mind,

'AUM' iti eka aksharam Brahma vyāharan Mām anusmaran
Yah prayaati tyajan deham Sah yaati paramaam gatim

(He who is released from the mortal coil, thinking of Me, and uttering the godly symbol, 'OM', undoubtedly attains supreme Beatitude).

Everywhere the scriptures assure us that the knower of God becomes one with the Known (Brahma-veda Brahmaa eva bhavati; Brahmaa eva san Brahmaa apyeti; Brahma-vit Brahmani sthitah). So it is not the literal time but the symbolic time which is meant by the Gita.

The Lord further clarifies in the Uttara Geetaa :

Yatra yatra mṛtah jnaanee yena kena api mṛtyunaa
Yathaa sarvagatam vyoma tatra tatra layam gatah

(At whatever time, and in whatever manner, the realised soul dies, he would still attain his unity with God — like the space that is immanent everywhere).

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—

REGULATIONS CONCERNING LIFE AFTER DEATH

Question : If it is not the seasonal time that is significant, why is it said that men like Bheeshma awaited the arrival of the 'Uttaraayanam' to leave this planet ?

Answer : We have to understand the end of Bheeshma from the standpoint of 'karma' and 'dharma', as related to the men of action and of the men of knowledge.

Bheeshma was not a 'sannyaasin'; he was bound by the dictates of a Kshatriya's 'dharma', which was to fight for justice. He knew that justice was on the side of Paandavas, but he was a warrior in the opposite camp of Kauravas. So he had not only to find a just way out of the battle but also to make that way conform to the edicts offered by the scriptures, as they are applied to men of action. That was one reason why he waited for the dawn of 'Uttaraayanam' to forsake his earthly life, for the sacred books maintain that death at that time would ensure no rebirth.

It is also possible that to die at the time when his mind was still clouded by the 'rajo guna' (mode of passion), which is evoked by war, would not help his salvation, because the final thought, as already said, is very important. So he stayed on the deathbed in meditation till he passed on to the state of the noble mode of 'sattwa', which directly leads to that Knowledge which is another name for Liberation (sattvaat sanjaayate jnaanam).

As you know, Bheeshma was favoured with the choice of dying whenever he pleased by his father's blessing. Taking advantage of this boon he concentrated on the Self till 'uttaraayana', as exhorted by the scriptures :

Swarah dhanuh śarah hi Aatmaa Brahma tat-lakshyam uchyate
Apramattena veddhavyam śaravat tat-mayah bhavet

(The 'AUM' is the bow, the self is the arrow, and the Brahman is the target; one must concentrate on God in the manner of the arrow that is aimed at the target).

That Bheeshma was lying on a bed of arrows symbolises the afore-mentioned state of Self-meditation.

Besides, the leaving of the body does not connote Liberation, in which case every dead person would achieve Salvation.

Dehasya mokshah mokshah na, na daṇḍasya kamaṇḍaloh
Avidyaa-hṛdaya-granthi-mokshah Mokshah yatah tatah

(It is not the liberation from the body that is spiritual Liberation, nor is it the wielding of the staff and the holy vessel; only the release from the ignorance that knots the heart of man is called real Liberation).

So Bheeshma had to stay on the death-bed till he was liberated from all the knots that tied his heart to the world — not just for another season to dawn.

ATTITUDE OF MIND AT TIME OF DEATH

Question : Revered sir, is it true that only those men who die while seated in comfort in 'Siddha Aasana' are eligible for salvation and that all those who die in discomfort are reborn ?

Answer : No, it is not true. The actions of even a realised soul, from his birth till his death, depend on his 'praarabdha' (predestination).

In order to determine whether a person is liberated or enslaved, the criterion is the standard and the state of his active life, but not the moment of his death. Several sinners die a happy death, and several great sages may have physical pain before they pass away. In this instance we have to say that the physical pleasure or pain has no relation to the dying person's soul and to its passage into birthlessness or rebirth.

Raaga-icchaa sukha-duhkha-aadi buddhau satyaam pravartate
Sushuptau na asti tat-naaśe tasmaat Buddheh tu na Aatmanah

(Passion, wish, joy, sorrow and the rest of human feelings exist only in the human intellect but not in the supreme Self — as is evident by their absence in deep sleep. Inasmuch as the creature is still alive in deep sleep, it is evident that it is the all-witnessing Self that is the ever-alive entity).

So, the man of wisdom realises that his bodily consciousness is not at all related to his spiritual awareness, and is unaffected by the former in whatever physical state he may be.

Neerogah upavishṭah vaa rugṇah vaa viluṭhan bhuvi
Moorchhitah tyajati eshah praaṇaan bhraanti na sarvadaa

(There can be no effect on the soul of the man of knowledge – whether he leaves his body as a healthy man or while seated or being ill or rolling in dust or in a swoon).

Even if the realised soul would appear to the outside world as though he were feeling the physical pain like the ignoramuses, it does not really matter, for once that momentary physical pain is gone he would once again be alive to his normal spirituality – like the person who does not remember in sleep what he studies earlier in the day, but remembers it on waking up.

PILGRIMAGE

Question : The seekers after truth and liberation take to pilgrimage in the hope of fulfilling their virtuous wishes. Is there really so much importance attached to pilgrimage, sir?

Answer : No doubt pilgrimage is highly beneficial. And yet, one must understand its true significance to realise its proper benefits.

In the ancient days people used to go on foot to visit the pilgrim centres. But now people are using vehicles. It is doubtful whether the latter derive the true benefit of pilgrimage. It is not by merely bathing in the sacred river or by doing similar external actions that the pilgrims get their virtuous rewards. If mere bathing in a holy river confers immense benefits on the bather, we should not see so many criminals and sinners living on the river banks.

At the same time we cannot say that the pilgrim centres like Varanasi and Rameswaram have no special significance,

The main thing is to take advantage of the presence of great seers in such places. One can learn a great deal from them, by their mere appearance and behaviour— apart from the wise counsel they offer the visitors. There is also the experience that one gains from one's own effort in making the pilgrimage and from the watching of the fellow-pilgrims. Then it is well known that travel broadens the mind.

Above all, the pilgrim centres are best suited to religious education, and, wherever there is a quiet spot available, to meditation, by their very geographical location.

And of course, just as certain fields are more fertile than others, the pilgrim centres are holier than the rest of the country.

When I said that travelling by foot was better, I meant that this would give the pilgrim the necessary patience, perseverence, tolerance and experience for devotional self-searching.

The atmosphere in holy places is surcharged with the sacred presence of the seers.

Nimisham nimisha-ardham vaa yatra tishṭhanti yoginah
Tatra tatra Kuru-kshetram Prāyāgah Naimiśam vanam

(No matter where they are, the places where the true Yogis stay even for a minute or a minute-and-a-half, there flourish all the great pilgrim centres like Kurukshetra or Prayaga or the Naimisa forest),

Nevertheless, remember the greatest pilgrim centre is your own 'heart-cave' (hridaya-guha) wherein the dwelling of God is best imagined, according to the scriptures.

Santyajya hṛt-guha-eeśaanam Devam anyam prayaanti ye
Te ratnam abhivaanchhanti tyaktvaa hastastha-kaustubham

(They, who go in search of God elsewhere, forgetting the ever-dwelling deity in their own hearts, are like the men who crave the earthly gems, throwing away the godly diamond, Kaustubha, which is already in their hands).

You have also to note that wherever the devotees gather to worship God there flourish all the holy rivers like Gangaa, Yamunaa, Venee, Godaavaree, Sindhu and Saraswatee, as the following verse puts it :

Tatra eva Gangaa Yamunaa cha Veṇee Godaavaree Sindhu Saraswatee
Sarvaaṇi teerthaani vasanti yatra Achyuta-naama kathaa-prasangah

And do you know which is the best pilgrim centre?

Kshamaa teertham tapah teertham teertham indriya-nigrahah
Sarva-bhoota-dayaa teertham dhyaana-teertham anuttamam

(Forbearance, penance, self-control and mercy towards all living beings, are the real places of pilgrimage; and the best pilgrim centre is Meditation).

The best sacred dip is in...

Dhyaana-hrade jnaana-jale raaga-dvesha-mala-apahe
Yah snaati maanase teerthe sah yaati paramaam gatim

(He who bathes in his mental waters filled with meditation and knowledge, cleaning his passion and prejudice, would attain the Supreme Beatitude).

Finally, just as you cannot clear your debts by seeking a new debt, you cannot be cleansed of your sins in any sacred place unless you first clean your mind with due faith in, and devotion to God.

DUTIES OF HOUSEHOLDER

Question : Esteemed sir, the way you preach self-control and condemn the association with women, makes one wonder whether there is no deliverence for the householders. Is one right to think that all sensual attachment is wrong?

Answer : I never decried the order of the householder's life, nor have I ever condemned the right kind of association with women.

On the contrary, on more than on occasion I have categorically declared that women have as much right to God-knowledge and to every kind of divine study, as men.

If I ever abuse women would I not be guilty of blaming my own mother, for is not all mankind given birth to by women ? I ask even the householders in our Aasrama to love their women and never to ill-treat them. But of course, I insist that the love of women, in the case of such devotees, should be related to the soul but not to the body.

If I do abuse women, it is only these of loose morals, who mislead the men.

I never forget that it is the right and privilege, duty and responsibility of the house holder (grihastha), to take care of the physical well-being of the men of the three other orders of life — the celibates, the retired people and the ascetics. They also have to offer oblations to their departed forefathers.

But I say that the 'order of the householder' (grihastha aasrama) should not be the be-all and the end-all of all existence. Once the householder fulfils his duty by his family, he must forsake the sensual attachments and concentrate on self-realisation.

If, however, one chooses to remain a householder, and yet seeks salvation, one has to master these four steps to Raaja Yoga. (In the case of women seekers, read 'she' for 'he').

1. Both husband and wife must be firmly united in god-consciousness ; that is, they must leave aside sex life, and the wife must always co-operate with the husband in his search for the Self.

2. People who are either too rich or too poor find it hard to engage themselves in the quest for God. Such people should either give up their search or find a way of earning (or keeping enough money and giving away in charity the excess, in the case of the rich) enough to keep body and soul together.

3. The householder must be his own master; he should not be accountable for his God-seeking actions to others.

4. If, however, he is an employee who is in active service, he shoud at least have some time to call his own, when he can devote himself heart and soul to godly activity.

Besides all these, as formerly noted, all his actions must be performed as offerings to God.

For, this is the usual procedure to Liberation :

Yajna-daana-aadibhih punyaih Yoga-siddhih bhavishyati
Yogaat sanjaayate jnaanam jnaanaat muktih na karmaṇaa

(By the performance of sacrifical rites, charity and similar good works, which are his ordained duties, the householder becomes fit to practise Yoga; by virtue of his Yogic practice he gains Knowledge of Self; from such self-knowledge alone is obtained Salvation — not by mere household duties).

So says Brahma Geetaa.

NON-DUAL STATES OF THE REALISED SOUL

Question : Finally, Holy Father, I should like to ask you once again about the licentiousness in food and drink which the men who claim to have attained to the Absolute enjoy. Will you please enlighten me on this point, revered sir ?

Answer : There are two orders of transcedental asceticism: "Ativarna" and "Avadhoota". This is the highest state of self-realisation, and only a minority of ascetics can claim to have mastered it.

The 'Avadhootas' see God in everything and everybody and to them appeal equally purity and impurity, honour and dishonour, heat and cold, gold and clay, men and women.

The 'Atyaasrama' state is thus described :

Aatmaanam Eeśwaram veda sah ati-varṇa-aaśramee bhavet
Yah avasthaa-traya nirmuktam avasthaa-saakshiṇam sadaa

(He who ever knows himself to be the all-witnessing Supreme Self, who is beyond the three mundane states of waking, dreaming and sleeping, is called the 'Atti-Varna-Aasramee' who is no longer affected by the divisions of caste or of the order of life).

As I said many times before, many quacks and charlatans have been masquerading in our midst as "Atyaasramis" and "Avadhootas".

As for their licentious behaviour in eating and drinking, I have already said that no such licence is permitted in the name of soul-realisation. Actually, the man who realises his real Self is more careful in not abusing the regulations handed down by the scriptures.

Doubtless, a real Atyaasramee and a genuine Avadhoota are the equals of the attributeless God. But without bothering about the almost unattainable status of such rare men, each and every person has the right and privilege to gain salvation by means of undebauched devotion, as the Lord assures us :

Maam cha yah avyabhichaareṇa Bhakti-yogena sevate
Sah guṇaan samateetya etaan Brahma-bhooyaaya kalpate

(He who worships me with unequivocal Devotion would eventually transcend the three physical modes— Sattva, Rajas and Tamas— and attain the supreme status of Brahman).

In conclusion, let me reiterate that all means are good, to the end of God-realisation, as long as they are sincerely and selflessly practised with the needed devotion, determination and dedication.

MEDITATION ON GURU

Whenever we start our devotional studies, it is advisable that we remember with gratitude the great lineage of sacred Gurus who have handed down to us the supreme truths of Salvation.

Here are some or the *ślokas* that serve this noble purpose.

Nārāyaṇam Padmabhuvam Vasiṣṭham
Saktim cha tat-putra Paraaśaram cha
Vyāsam Śukam Gauḍapadam mahaantam
Govinda-yogeendram atha asya śishyam
Śree Śankaraachaaryam atha asya Padma-
paadam cha Hastaamalakam cha sishyam
Tam Toṭakam vaartika-kaaram anyaan
asmat guroon santatam annatah asmi

(May I ever bow to the lineage of Gurus ranging from Vishnu, Brahmaa, Vasishtha, Paraasara, Vyaasa, Suka, Gaudapaada, Govinda Yogi, Sankaraachaarya, Padmapaada, Hastaamalaka, Totaka, Suresvaraachaarya and others).

Eeśwarah Guruh Aatmaa iti moorti-bheda-vibhaagine
Vyomavat vyaapta-dehaaya Dakshiṇaa-moortaye namah

(I salute Lord Dakshinaamoorti who is as all-pervasive as the sky, and yet in His manifestation has the three phases of God, Teacher and Self).

Guruh Brahmaa guruh Vishṇuh guruh Devah Maheśwarah
Guruh saakshaat Param Brahma tasmai Śree Gurave namah

(Obeisance to my Guru who is none other than the equal of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and the Universal Self).

Ajnaana-timira-andhasya vishaya-aakraanta-chetasah
Jnaana-prabhaa-prasaadena prasadam kuru me Prabho !

(O Master, grant me Thy light of knowledge which will dispel the darkness of my ignorance and free me from the clutches of my senses !).

INFLUENCE OF GURU

Dhyaana-moolam guroh moortih poojaa-moolam guroh padam
Mantra-moolam guroh vaakyam mukti-moolam guroh kripaa

(The personality of the Teacher is the source of Meditation; His feet, the source of worship; His teaching, the source of the chanted hymn; and His mercy, the source of Salvation).

A-trinetrah Śivah saakshaat Dwi-baahuh cha Harih smritah
Yah a-chaturvadanah Brahmaa Śree Guruh kathitah, priye !

(Although he does not have three eyes, the teacher is the equal of Lord Shiva; although he does not have four hands, he is the equal of Lod Vishnu ; and, although he does not have four hands, he is the equal of Lord Brahmaa).

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NIRVAANA SHATKAM

Manah-buddhi-ahankaara-chittaani na Aham
na śrotram na jihvaa na cha ghraaṇa-netre
Na cha vyoma-bhoomih na tejah na vaayuh
Chit-Aananda-roopah Śivah Aham Śivah Aham

(My real Self is not the mind or the intellect or the ego or the consciousness; nor is it the ear or the tongue or the nose or the eye; neither is it the sky or the earth or the fire—light—or the air : indeed, my real Self is of the essence of the Universal Self, which is the quintessence of Consciousness-Bliss).

Na cha praaṇa-sanjnah na vai pancha-vaayuh
na vaa sapta-dhaatuh na vaa pancha-kośah
Na vaak paaṇi paadau na cha upastha-paayee
Chit-Aananda-roopah ....

(No more am I the symbol of life or the fivefold vital breath ; nor the seven physical elements or the five sheaths; nor the speech or the hands or the feet or the generative organ or the rectum ; indeed, my real Self is.............).

Na me dwesha-raagau na me lobha-mohau
madah na eva me na eva maatsarya-bhaavah
Na dharmah na cha arthah na kaamah na mokshah
Chit-Aananda-roopah ....

(I have neither hatred nor passion; neither avarice nor delusion; neither pride nor vanity; nor am I hankering after righteousness or wealth or wish-fulfilment or deliverance : indeed, my real Self is ....).

Na puṇyam na paapam na saukhyam na duhkham
na mantrah na teertham na vedaah na yajnah
Aham bhojanam na eva bhojyam na bhoktaa
Chit-Aananda-roopah ....

(No longer am I concerned with piety or sin, with pleasure or pain; neither am I the sacred syllable or the holy water or the scripture or the sacrifice; nor am I the food or its ingredients or its eater; indeed, my real Self is........).

Na mṛtyuh na śankaa na me jaati-bhedah
pitaa na eva me na eva maataa cha janma
Na bandhuh na mitram guruh na eva śishyah
Chit-Aananda-roopah ....

(I am not bound by death or doubt or racial identity; neither am I attached to father or mother or creation; nor have I any relations or friends or teacher or disciples; indeed, my real self. is..).

Aham nirvikalpah Niraakaara-roopah
vibhutvaat cha sarvatra sarva-indriyaaṇaam
Na cha asangatam na eva muktih na me yah
Chit-Aananda-roopah ....

(I am the formless form of the changeless Self : since I am the master of all my sense-organs in every kind of activity, I am no longer concerned about non-attachment or liberation : indeed, my real Self is...)

Thus ends the 'Nirvaana Shaatkam' by Sankaraachaarya.

YATI PANCHAKAM

Vedaanta-vaakyeshu sadaa ramantah
bhikshaanna maatreṇa cha tuṣṭimantah
Aśokavantah karuṇaikawantah
kaupeenavantah khalu bhaagyavantah

(Verily they are the truly rich : the hermits who delight in the philosphical words of wisdom; who are contented with the food they are offered by way of alms; who are never hit by distress; who are ever merciful ; and who are simply clad in the Loin-cloth).

Moolam taroh kevalam aaśrayantah
Paaṇi-dwaye bhoktum amantrayantah
Śriyam cha kanthaam iva kutsayantah
kaupeenavantah khalu ....

(Verily they are the truly rich : the hermits who find shelter under the tree; who never greedily seek to eat with both hands; and who treat the material riches of life as mere rags).

Deha-abhimaanam parihritya dooraat
Aatmaanam aatmani avalokayantah
Ahah-niśam Brahmaṇi ye ramantah
kaupeenavantah khalu ....

(Verily they are the truly rich: the hermits who have left far behind the false love of the body; who see the Universal Self in their own inner self; and who day and night rejoice in the Absolute).

Swa-aananda-bhaave paritushṭimantah
sa-śaanta sarva-indriya-vṛttimantah
Na antam na madhyam na bahih smarantah
kaupeenavantah khalu ....

(Verily they are truly the rich: the hermits who are ever pleased with the inner delights of the Self; whose senses no longer trouble them: and who are unmindful of the distinctions of the end, the middle and the appearance of mundane things in their holistic view of the universe).

Pancha-aksharam paavanam uchcharantah
patim paśoonaam hridi bhaavayantah
Bhikshaaśinah dikshu paribhramantah
kaupeenavantah khalu ....

(Verily they are the truly rich: the hermits who keep chanting the name of Lord Shiva— 'Namah Sivaaya'; who treasure Lord Shiva in their heart of hearts; and who wander everywhere carefreely, satisfied with whatever nourishment they are offered by way of charity).

Thus ends the 'Yati Panchakam' by Sankaraachaarya.

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NAARAAYANA HRIDAYAM

AUM Naaraayaṇah param jyotih, Aatmaa Naaraayaṇah parah
Naaraayaṇah param Brahma Naaraayaṇa ! Namah astu Te !

(I salute The, Lord Naaraayana, Thou who art the light of lights, the Universal Self, the Absolute).

Naaraayaṇah upaasyah syaat guruh Naaraayaṇah parah
Naaraayaṇah parah bodhah Naaraayaṇa ! namah astu te !

(Obeisance to Naaraayana, the most worshippable one, the supreme teacher, the highest knowledge!).

—

SIVA DHYAANA AMRITAM

Vedaanta-vedyaaya Mahodayaaya
Maheśwaraaya Aaśrita-vatsalaaya
Śree Neelakanthaaya Yama-antakaaya
Śivaa-sametaaya Namah Śivaaya

(I salute Lord Shiva, the knower of the metaphysical Truth, the harbinger of the higher power, the supreme deity, the great protector of those who seek His refuge, the blue-throated one who consumed the hell-fire to save the gods, the queller of the god of death, and the spouse of the goddess Paarvati – the primal Energy).

SHAT-AADHAARA DHYAANAM

Moolaadhaare vaarija-patre su-chatushke
Vam Śam Sham Sam varna-viśaale su-viśaale
Raktam varnam Śree Gana-naatham Bhagavantam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim pranatah asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya— who assumes the role of Lord Vinaayaka in the 'moolaadhaara' base of the beautiful four-cornered lotus, which is scarlet-hued and which depicts in broad delight the miraculous letters 'Vam', 'Sam', 'Sham', and 'Sam').

Swaadhishthaane shat-dala-patre sah tu linge
Baalaam taavat varna-viśaale su-viśaale
Peetam varnam Vaakpati-roopam Druhinam tam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim pranatah asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya - who is the creaive force, assuming the role of the lord of speech, Brihaspati, in he yellow-hued, wide, six-petalled lotus of 'swaadhishthaana wheel).

Naabhau padme patra-daśaare da pha varne
Lakshmee-kaantam Garuda-aaroodham nara-veeram
Neelam varnam nirguna-roopam nigama-antam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim pranatah-asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya— who, in the navel region of the '*manipoora*'- symboled, ten-petalled lotus, assumes the blue form of the Garuda bird-riding, attributeless, metaphysical Lord Vishnu, representing the charmed letters, 'da' and 'pha'),

Hrit-padma ante dwaadaśa-patre ka-tha-varne
Saambam Śaivam hamse-viśesham śamayantam
Sarga-sthiti-antam kurvantam Śiva-śaktim
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim pranatah asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya – who, inside the twelve-petalled lotus, bearing the miraculous letters 'ka' and 'tha', resides in the 'anaahata' region of the heart of the lotus,

representing the creation, preservation, destruction and re-creation of the universe, by His benevolent power of canalising the 'energy' source of the universe through His spouse, Shakti).

Kantha-sthaane chakra-viśuddhe kamalaante
Chandra-aakaare shodaśa-patre swa-ra-varṇe
Maayaadheeśam beeja-Śivam tam nija-roopam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim praṇatah-asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya— who, in the 'visuddha chakra' region of the throat, in the shape of the moon, in the sixteen-petalled lotus, bearing the letters 'swa' and 'ra', reigns supreme as the transcendent lord of the creative principle in the original form of the eternal spirit, the Master of creational 'Maayaa').

Aajnaa-chakre bhrukuṭi-sthaane dwi-dala-ante
Ham ksham beejam jnaana-samudram guru-moortim
Vidyut-varṇam jnaana-mayam tam jaṭila-aakhyam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim praṇatah-asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya, who, occupying between the eyebrows, the 'aajnaa chakra', inside the two-petalled lotus, symbolising the charmed letters, 'ham' and 'ksham', shines like the lightning of supreme knowledge).

Moordhni-sthaane vaarija-patre śaśi-beeje
Śubhram varṇam padma-sahasram su-viśaalam
Ham beeja-aakhyam varṇa-sahasram tureeya-antam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim praṇatah-asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya, who, in the transcendent state of the pure-white-hued, moon-based, region of the head of the thousand-petalled lotus, bearing the charmed letter, 'Ham', pervades the universe of supreme knowledge, hidden in the serpent-coil-like form of the human body beginning with the seat and ending in the crown).

Brahmaanandam Brahma Mukundam bhagavantam
Brahma-jnaanam satyam anantam bhava-roopam
Poorṇam Chit-ghana-panchama-khanḍam Śiva-roopam
Dattaatreyam Śree Guru-moortim praṇatah-asmi

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya, who is the quintessence of the transcendent knowledge, the ultimate reality, and the godly majesty ; who is the omniscient symbol of truth, infinity and creativity ; and who is the Blissful essence of the highest pure consciousness of the Absolute).

Śaantaakaaram śesha-śayaanam sura-vandyam
Kaantaa-naatham komala-gaatram kamala-aksham
Chintaa-ratnam Chit-ghana-poorvam dwija-raajam
Dattaatreyam ....

(I bow to the supreme teacher, Dattaatreya, who is the personification of peace, the dweller upon the bed of the divine serpent, Sesha; the lord of the gods, the spouse of Lakshmee, the delicate-limbed, lotus-eyes one, the gem that grants the devotee's wishes, the forerunner of pure consciousness ; and the king of scholars).

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SREE VENKATESWARA MANGALA PANCHAKAM

AUM : Sriyah kaantaaya kalyaaṇa-nidhaye nidhaye arthinaam
Sree Venkaṭa-nivaasaaya Sreenivaasaaya mangalam

(All hail to the spouse of Lakshmee, the treasure-trove of goodness, the cornucopia of the needy, the dweller on the mount Venkata — the destroyer of all sins !)

Nityaaya niravadyaaya satya-aananda-chit-aatmane
Sarva-antaraatmane Sreemat Venkatesaaya mangalam

(Glory to Lord Venkateswara, who is the enternal, pure, true, blissful, conscient soul, pervading all creation !).

Parasmai Brahmaṇe Pooṛṇa-kaamaaya Parama-aatmane
Prasanna-para-tattvaaya Venkatesaaya mangalam

(Blessed be the Lord Venkateswara who is the Ultimate reality, the perfect realiser of all wishess, and the happy knower of the supreme self-knowledge!)

Sree vaikunṭha-viraktaaya Swaami-pushkariṇee taṭe
Ramayā ramamaaṇaaya Venkatesaaya mangalam

(All hail to Lord Venkateswara who, detached from His heavenly abode, came down to the Sesha mountain on the banks of the sacred lake, and who gloriously remains in the pleasant company of His divine spouse, Lakshmee).

Sreemat-sundara-jaamaatri-muni-maansa-vaasine
Sarva-loka-nivaasaaya Sreenivaasaaya mangalam

(Obeisance to Lord Sreenivaasa, the God-incarnate son-in-law of a human king, the constant dweller in the minds of the sages, and the sacred spirit pervading the entire created world !)

OM SAANTIH SAANTIH SAANTIH

LOKAAH SAMASTAAH SUKHINAH BHAVANTU
(May all the world be ever happy !)

OM TAT SAT